

THE
RENCONTRE:

OR,
TRANSITION of a MOMENT.

A
NOVEL,
In a SERIES of LETTERS

By a L A D Y.
In TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE HISTORY OF A MOUNTAIN



BY A. A. A. V.
TWO VOLUMES

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P R E F A C E.

A PREFACE, my good Sir! I never wrote one in my life, and scarcely ever read half a dozen. One always skips over the preface to a novel; and indeed so little are they regarded in general, that I imagined they had been wholly out of fashion.

My Bookfeller, gentle Reader, wants me to write a preface; but to what purpose? If it is to bespeak *thy* good opinion, thou art a person of

too much judgment to be biassed by what the partial parent says of her beloved offspring; and less excusable is to pretend to display its scope, intention, moral; for that would be an affronting doubt of thy penetration, a piece of ill breeding of which believe me incapable; or it would betray in myself a horrid consciousness of bad painting, ~~thus to be reduced~~ to write under my nag, **THIS IS A HOBBY HORSE.** Why a preface then, for heaven's sake? I vow I know not what to say---no matter, nobody *reads* prefaces, you know of course it is of very little consequence how they are *wrote*. If a page or two is but filled, the etiquette is performed and there is an end. Away with fear then, and let us begin.

GENTLE READER!

—**PSHAW**—that is a very antique mode of address;

FIN

FAIR LADY!

—For such I have a presentiment thou art, who, under the hands of thy hair dresser, having read to the end of the volume, for want of having another at hand to beguile the tedious time, he is fiddle-faddling about thee, turnest back to the preface, and does it the honour of a perusal—I have so tender a regard for thy peace of mind, that I caution thee to beware how thou censurest the following little work, lest thou chancest unwittingly to wound the bosom of thy friend. I am, as thou suppose it, unknown to thee; but how wilt thou be assured of that? art thou *certain* that thou hast not, amongst all thy acquaintance, one whom thus in secret indulges an itch for writing? I protest to thee that I have a very large acquaintance, only *one* of whom is intrusted with the secret of my being an authorefs; so exceedingly afraid am I of being ridiculed for my ill successes—*should* I ha successes—in
my

my endeavours to please the public. Yet, I will whisper you as a friend, so strangely contradictory is the human——I should rather say the *female* heart, the men——wise souls!——*always* being consistent, reasonable, &c. &c. You imagine perhaps, from this intimate knowledge of their superlative perfections, that I am married——how I admire your penetration!——but where was I?——Oh——yet I say, so contradicting is the *female* heart, that though I thus wrap myself up in obscurity, and hide me from my nearest friends, yet I sigh for fame, and am ready to cry with Cowley,

What shall I do to be *for ever* known,
And make the *age* to come my own?

Alas! writing novels is *not* the path to fame; even Richardson, the divine Richardson! is neglected, if not almost forgotten, stands unheeded upon the shelf, with Fielding and Smollett, whilst every new piece of nonsense is read before them; bubbles

bles that burst, and are lost for ever, almost as soon as the breath of vanity blows them into being-----but they are *read* first.-----New!-----there is magic in the word-----well then, at least I have *this* advantage, *I* shall be new, shall be read of course, and then-----alas, my dear friend! will you not, by *your* plaudit, endeavour to keep me from sinking a *little* while-----alas! perhaps *I* shall be forgotten-----Heigh-ho!-----I really am so melancholy I can add no more.

THE
RENCONTRE;

OR,

TRANSITION of a MOMENT.

LETTER I.

Miss Maria Belville, to Miss Louisa Fermor.

YOUR wonder, my dear, at the striking disparity of fortune in two sisters, does not surprize me; it must be matter of astonishment to every one who has not been sufficiently intimate with our family to be made acquainted with those, I will call them unfortunate incidents which gave rise to it.

It will give me pain to display a parent's imperfections, but alas! they are already but too apparent; my mother takes no pains to conceal the hatred she has for me. Oh my Louisa, long as I have known it, and it was one of the first perceptions of

B

my

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my infant mind, the fatal reflection ceases not to wring my soul with excruciating torture. I am seated, my dear, to gratify your curiosity; by participation, you say, sorrows are lessened, and you insist upon sharing mine: How soothing to that ear which is almost a stranger to the soft, the sweet accents of pity or of love!

By the death of his father, and an elder brother, who upon some discontent left his paternal abode, and rambling about the world was at last lost in an outward-bound India ship, which foundered in its voyage; my father was scarcely of age when he found himself in possession of a very considerable estate; this, joined to a very good person, a polite address, a well cultivated understanding, and an agreeable vivacity, made his company courted by all, and he found himself exceedingly well received among the ladies.

Almost intoxicated with the flattering distinction, he was in great danger of becoming a coxcomb, when chance presented to him one evening at a ball a young lady, of whom he became instantly enamoured. She was exquisitely handsome, and charmed with her person, his imagination supplied to her every other perfection he thought necessary to his happiness: he saw good nature dimpled in her blooming cheek, the most brilliant wit sparkled in her fine eyes; he

he listened to the finest voice in the world, he gazed on lips that in delicacy of hue outvied the shining coral, and was astonished at the goodness of her understanding and the justness of her sentiments

He intreated the honour of her hand, and was in raptures to find her not engaged; he made the best use of his time, and was transported to find she listened to his extravagant flattery with a seeming pleasure, and he never left her the whole evening but to enquire among his acquaintance who she was; from one of whom he learned that she was the only daughter of a man of fortune in a neighbouring country, and was then upon a visit to a young lady in the neighbourhood; pleased with this intelligence, as it reconciled his prudence to his love, my father redoubled his assiduties; and as she danced finely, and liked the attentions of her partner, it was late before they parted.

My father attended the object of his passion the next morning at the house of her friend, and found her as lovely in her dishabille as in a more ornamented, I will not say a more studied dress; and he pursued her with such ardour, that she could not refuse him her leave to apply himself to her father; a shrewd old man, who taking advantage of my father's disinterested passion, made what is called a good

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bargain for his daughter; that is to say, a very large allowance for pin money, an unlimited disposal of her own fortune, after the death of her husband; and likewise of half his estate, which was settled upon her as jointure.

Passionately in love, young, gay, and inconsiderate, my father readily subscribed to all these unreasonable demands, without once reflecting on their pernicious consequence, and at length was put in possession of all his wishes.

A constant succession of gay company, balls, plays, and all sorts of public diversions, in which his fair bride was so well qualified to shine, for some months engrossed their attention; a house in London was taken, and they both entered with spirit into all the gaieties of polite life.

At length, sickened with the constant rotation, as he had naturally a turn for domestic happiness, my father was desirous of returning to his family mansion, and enjoying by himself the sprightly conversation of his Harriet; but how was he surprized and disappointed, when that Harriet, who had been all tender complaisance, all soft acquiescence to every pleasurable scheme he had hitherto been studious to engage her in, declared with raised complexion, and eyes sparkling with indignation, that if he was weary of the town

town diversions, as the Bath season was coming in, she would with all her heart accompany him thither, or should like of all things to take the tour of Europe; but she was *determined* not to be buried in the country, for she *hated* and *detested* country houses!

In vain he represented the rural beauties of his seat, its vicinity to a very considerable town, where she might enjoy many of her darling pleasures almost in as high perfection as in the metropolis; impossible, she cried; she hated the company of country Misses, and the awkward civilities of booby Esquires, and repeated her determination not to comply.

Vext at her obstinacy, my father retired to his closet, and there painfully contemplated the demolition of all his air-built schemes of domestic happiness.

His eyes were by this time sufficiently opened to the imprudence of his conduct, in choosing a wife merely for a beautiful outside, and taking the virtues of her mind upon trust. He now plainly saw what he had lately suspected, though he was unwilling to whisper it even to himself, that a fine person, and those accomplishments which shew it to most advantage, comprized her merit; full of vivacity and lively chit-chat in company, but an insipid lifeless companion in a tête à tête at home; without one liberal idea, one generous

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sentiment, her dear self engrossed her whole attention, and universal admiration formed the first wish of her heart.

Still, however, he loved her, though with abated affection; and as she was not to be prevailed upon to join in his scheme of happiness, he acquiesced in hers; but soon had the additional mortification of finding her a finished coquette; she flirted openly with every well-dressed coxcomb, and himself was generally the only man in company neglected by her: his only consolation was the observing she had no particular favourite; she would go ridiculous lengths to gain a lover, but once secure of his heart, she gave herself no other trouble about him, than by a few smiles to keep him in her train.

Still, however, my father now and then presumed to remonstrate, but ill humour and contempt were the only returns he met with. At length, satiated with the possession of a woman who had no mental charms to detain her lover when beauty palled upon the sense, he sought abroad that happiness he could not find at home, and by way of drowning reflection, plunged headlong into every fashionable vice.

But I am interrupted. Adieu, my dear Louisa, for the present, and believe me most affectionately yours,

MARIA BELVILLE.

L E T-

LETTER II.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

A GAIN, my dear Louisa, I resume the pen.

For some years did the gay couple, I described in my last, tread separately the giddy round of folly and dissipation: in the second year of the marriage my sister Harriet was born, who was one of the loveliest children that ever was seen, and complimented with being the exact resemblance of my mother: three years after my unfortunate self beheld the light; but as I unhappily did not possess so delicate a complexion, nor so fine a set of features, I was thought by my mother unworthy her regard, and was treated by her with the most mortifying neglect.

Ten years elapsed in this manner, when a shattered constitution and the rude clamours of his numerous creditors awoke my father from his delirium; and upon his recovery from a violent illness, the effects of intemperance, which had brought death full to his view, with all its train of consequential terrors, he discarded his debauched companions, and sat in earnest to look into, and reform his affairs.

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He was greatly alarmed at discovering his debts to amount to more than that half of the estate which was not secured to my mother. He had no money, my mother's fortune was in trustees hands, and he too well knew her temper to have much hopes she would use her interest with them to give up any part to extricate him from his present difficulties; he however laid the distracted state of his affairs before her, and used every argument to persuade her to the generous action, but, as he expected, without effect.

His creditors growing every day more troublesome, my father saw no other method of satisfying them than selling the part of his estate left to his own disposal, retiring into the country; and out of the remaining part of his income, which would then be a very fine one, pay the remainder of his debts, and save some fortune for his youngest daughter, whom he now for the first time recollected would be left wholly in the power of a mother who made no secret of the unnatural aversion she had conceived for her.

He had until now taken but little notice of either of us; he had indeed now and then transiently admired the beautiful person of my sister, or been amused for a few minutes with my harmless prattle, but he had been too little at home, and too much

much absorbed in pleasure to have but little leisure, and less inclination, to attend much to us. Every thing now appeared in a different light, and a sentiment of pity endeared me particularly to him; he represented to my mother in as mild terms as possible the injustice, the cruelty of her neglect: but had the pain to find his remonstrances only the more enraged her against me, and provoked her to add hard usage to her disregard.

This hastened my father in fixing a plan for his future life; and one day calling her into his closet, he painted in glowing colours her imprudent, her ungenerous conduct; and making it plainly appear from the embarrassed state of his affairs, a total reformation in their manner of life absolutely necessary, he acquainted her with his resolution of selling the part of his estate in his power, his town house with its expensive furniture, and retiring wholly into the country, endeavour to save a little money for his youngest girl, as he saw very plainly what she had to trust to from such a mother's affection.

My mother now with rage and storm, and now with fits and tears, endeavoured to shake his resolution, but in vain; her foolish, her ungenerous, her cruel behaviour had entirely alienated his heart, and he told her in so many words that though

he could not command the principal, the interest of her fortune was his during his life, as likewise her jointure, and he should dispose of the income of both in the manner he thought most conducive to the welfare of his family : her allowance for pin money was extravagantly large, if she thought it sufficient to support herself and favourite in town, she was exceedingly welcome to continue there, in lodgings, or an house of her own choosing ; as his resolution was unalterable in selling his own, with all its appurtenances ; and he, with his poor neglected Maria, he doubted not, should live mighty comfortably by themselves in the country.

My mother, in spite of her spirit and obstinacy, was obliged to yield to the arbitrary will of her positive lord : a woman of character as governess to teach us needle work, &c. was engaged, and my father soon found himself settled much to his mind in his family mansion.

As this makes a considerable epocha in our little history, pardon my making a pause here, and believe me my dear Louisa's truly affectionate

MARIA BELVILLE.

L E T-

L E T T E R III.

Miss Maria Beville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

MY father devoted himself in his retirement to the harmless amusements of the country; his garden, fishing, shooting, and hunting, employed him without doors; reading, drawing, and music, in the two latter of which he excelled, were an inexhaustible fund of amusement within: to which he very soon added the care of my education. I was too young when he first settled in the country to be capable of profiting by his lectures; but my mother's harsh treatment, who used me sometimes very cruelly, for as she look'd upon me as the reason of my father's removing her so far from her darling pleasures, her aversion for me was considerably increased, and, strange as it may sound, her child was become the object of her most inveterate hatred: this treatment, which increased my father's love in proportion to his pity, determined him, as he thought he discovered a docility of temper and some quickness of apprehension in me, to take me under his own care, and inspect and direct my education.

My sister, with a most exquisitely beautiful person, had a mind with every capability

pability of being formed into an excellent character; but my poor mother was the very reverse of the industrious and delicately distinguishing bee, who "from poisonous herbs extracts the healing dew"; she has converted the beauties of her person into a poison for her mind; her understanding was directed to no other pursuits than the adoring that person to the greatest advantage; that person of whose beauties she heard every day such extravagant encomiums, can we wonder that it has raised her vanity to the utmost excess, and that we find her degenerated into affectation and coquetry? or that she looks down with the utmost contempt upon her inferiors, when dress, fortune, and figure were pointed out to her as the only criterions of merit? my mother was wholly insensible of that true dignity which superiority of soul alone confers; and knew no other method of distinguishing herself, than by a splendid appearance, and haughtiness of behaviour.

My sister treated me at first with insolence and contempt, more from example than real dislike, or ill humour, for, on the contrary, she was naturally good humoured and well disposed; but as we grew up, the advantages my father's method of education gave me over her, with the few rational beings that visited at our house, piqued

piqued my mother, who failed not to communicate her sentiments to her darling, and thus, envy with all the pungent pangs of that most painful, most diabolical of passions, became early implanted in her young breast. So far from looking upon my dear father with duty and reverence, she was taught a pertness of behaviour to him, which often hurt him much; and as my mother delighted to place his actions and manner in the most ridiculous and contemptible light, she of consequence beheld them through the same medium. Poor girl! in return for the hatred and contempt she often expresses for me, I feel no other sentiment than pity rise in my soul, and the sincerest sorrow for talents, and a heart, so unfortunately perverted.

The first precept my father endeavoured to inculcate, was a strong sense of the omnipresence of the Deity; as imagining a person with a firm conviction that she is always in the presence of the King of Kings, whose pure eyes not only are witness to her every action, but penetrate her most secret thoughts, will be uniformly virtuous in her behaviour; and retain that purity of heart, without which the most rigid outward deportment is but detestable hypocrisy. "Conscious of his presence who made the worlds, how solicitous ought we

we to be, said the dear monitor, by adorning our minds with every virtue, to appear beautiful in his sight! To be the admiration of angels, to be beloved by the eternal King of Heaven—What can the highest earthly ambition present to our wishes as an equivalent? Is it possible! can it be that we can neglect the means of attaining the exalted, the glorious approbation, which insures to us honour and eternal felicity, and with groveling souls bound our foolish wishes to the gaining, and probably fail even in that, the attention of the most frivolous and insignificant of mortals?"

"In religion alone, My Maria, is true happiness to be found: the politic and the worldly veil deep in their bosoms those inclinations and passions which are inconsistent with their interest or their reputation; but which rage with redoubled violence from the constraint, and often like unruly beasts burst their chain, and disclose themselves to view when least desired. Or if this does not happen, he who acts an unnatural part must be in perpetual pain, as constant disguise must be constant fear of detection. The religious man exerts his utmost endeavours to *be*, what the politic only wishes to *seem*; and is under no apprehensions that some sudden transport should throw him off his guard,

guard, and display that heart which he wishes not to disguise, but amend."

"Whilst others are torn by envy and jealousy at another's superior success, at the display of another's accomplishments; he rejoices at their welfare, he loves the perfections of human nature as resembling the God he adores. He fears not the person of the most powerful, conscious of the protection of that great Being to whom the weak inhabitants of earth are but as the emmets beneath the foot of the traveller. Do misfortunes unlooked for overtake him, after the first sighs which the infirmity of human nature heaves in his bosom, he looks upwards and recollects that infinite wisdom and goodness holds the reins of government, and disposes the most minute events: that the potion of the physician is often nauseous, the corrections of the parent sometimes severe; that satisfied with the judgment and good intentions of the one we submit to his prescriptions with cheerfulness, and when a few years have matured our reason, look up to the other with thankfulness, for what, at the time, occasioned bitterness and tears: our view is bounded by the present moment, whilst the keen glance of our Eternal Father takes in the whole chain, the mortal and immortal part of our existence, and adapts every part to the benefit of that whole: with these

these considerations, 'his hand the good man fastens in the skies, and bids earth reel, nor heeds her idle whirl'.

"He is easy and satisfied in that station in which it has pleased the Great Ruler of events to place him, and endeavours, to the utmost of his power, to acquit himself, faithfully and conscientiously, in the discharge of the duties of it. In prosperity, he is affable, humble, and benevolent; he regards his riches as intrusted to him for the benefit of his poor brethren, and distributes, with judgment and prudence, among them, what the thoughtless devote to their luxuries, or their lusts. Is he poor? he is patient and resigned, and acquiesces, without a murmur, in the will of unerring wisdom. Even in the most distressing, and most irreparable of all the misfortunes human nature is liable to, the death of our dearest friends, he has the cordial hope to support him, of meeting again in those realms of never ending felicity, where sickness and death enter not. And his own death, the imagination of which appals the heart of the worldly, and chills his soul with horror, is the highest triumph to the good man, the glorious crown of his victory."

Thus did my father paint to me the felicity of the virtuous on this side the grave; and, he would add, that the good man

was

was not only the happiest in himself, but the most agreeable to others, and, as the most perfectly easy, bade fair to be the most perfectly polite likewise; for, my dear, said he, can he be awkward and embarrassed in the presence of the greatest man upon the earth, when he is conscious of always acting in the presence of the King of Kings, whom he has at all times the liberty of addressing? and, believe me, my dear, the precepts of the Gospel are the rules of true politeness; they forbid all arrogance of behaviour, and command the giving all due honour to others, but assuming none; sincerity and benevolence dwell in the heart of that happy man, who walks by its divine instructions, and sets upon his unclouded brow; his temper is serene, and unruffled by the infirmities and perversenesses of others; he pities the frailties of human nature, but takes care to keep untainted from its errors; in every indifferent matter, he cheerfully conforms to the humours and desires of those about him; but in essentials, he is firm and immoveable; yielding as the element, where the honour of his God was not concerned; but steadfast as the rock of adamant, in the duties of his faith."

"Religion in women is peculiarly becoming, Maria, and renders even their persons more amiable, for benevolence,
humility,

humility, and meekness softens the harshest features, attunes the voice to harmony; and the heart becomes a willing captive to the heavenly influence of female goodness and piety."

My duty to my mother, was the next lesson the dear saint endeavoured to inculcate; it was indeed comprehended among the duties religion teaches, but required, with me, a separate lecture, and, to own the truth, was the most difficult lesson I learned; I was too sensible of her unmerited dislike, and had a mind too tender and susceptible not to be exceedingly hurt by it: but he made me comprehend, that no failure another makes in her duty, can excuse the not performing ours. "Besides, my dear, he would add, considered in a mere worldly light, it would be highly impolitic to justify another's prejudices by an undutiful, or even by an ill-humoured sullen behaviour: do you always perform your duty, my dear girl, be always cheerfully obedient to her commands; receive her reproofs with meekness, and humility; and always endeavour, to the utmost of your power, to amend, what she will find amiss; the scrutinizing eye of envy and ill-nature, will often copy faults overlook'd by the fond, the indulgent parent; and thus, my dear, her dislike to you may be of much greater service than her fond partiality

tiality would have been, in rendering you the perfect character I so ardently wish to see you.

“ With whatever ill-humour she treats you, take unremitting care never to be discomposed yourself; you see the odiousness of such a temper, and, be it your study to preserve yours placid and serene. She has suffered her ill-nature, her prejudices, and passions, to take such strong root by constant indulgence, that it is not now in her own power to get the better of them: beware, from her example, of giving way to a transient fit of ill-humour, least it should, as it certainly will, pave the way to an habitual ill-temper. Good humour, and a benevolent disposition, will make people of ordinary talents infinitely pleasing; a contrary temper renders the finest odious; we admire fine sense and great accomplishments; we esteem those who do great and charitable actions; but the good-natured seizes our love, sometimes without the assistance of another good quality. Let not this gem, my Maria, be wanting in your breast, for the sake of your own happiness; for to cherish a desire of needless contradiction, of vexing, teizing, and mortifying those about us, though began with trifling matters, lead, by insensible degrees, to the temper of a fiend. Much allowance must be made for the infirmity of human nature;
for,

for, whatever attempts the best make at perfection, they must fall infinitely short; be never out of humour, therefore, at finding no one perfect, but be content to take human nature as you find it; and make all that kind allowance, for the infirmities and weakneses of those with whom you converse, or are connected with, you would wish they should make for you.

“Behave to your mother, as near as you can, without fault, and let her deny you her love if she can; at least, you will have the happy consciousness of having deserved it; but repine not at the want of it, or envy your sister the possession; for what has she gained by fond indulgence, but to be insolent, spiteful, and revengeful; vain, affected, and ridiculous? Is she happier than yourself? she is, indeed, finer dressed and more admired, by those who stop at exterior perfections, but does she enjoy that calm content, that beamy sunshine of the breast, that passions well regulated alone can give? did you never see her colour with indignation, or swell with envy, at a finer gown, or the praises bestowed on another’s complexion? the slightest contradiction puts her into a flame, and her happiness, like the downy feather, is in the power of every breath of wind. But I fear, my love, my long lectures fatigue your spirits; let me not load your memory, or oppress

oppress and sadden your heart ; give me, my Maria, a song with your guitar, and then we will take an airing on horse back."

Thus did this excellent parent daily infuse the truest philosophy into my soul, and sweetly variegate the gravest lectures, with the most agreeable amusements.—Happy hours ! irrecoverably flown ! the delightful, the painful recollection affects me too much to proceed.—Ever yours,

MARIA BELVILLE.

LETTER IV.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

AMIDST these graver studies, the more ornamental parts of education were not neglected ; my father taught me French, Italian, Music, and Drawing ; was particularly careful that I excelled in dancing, and indeed, very attentive to every part of my behaviour ; " Your sister, said he, Maria, has stole all the beauty, be it your study to acquire the graces : the admiration excited by mere beauty, is short-lived and soon fades upon the soul ; the graceful for ever charms ; every action, every movement is interesting."

Thus flew the first fifteen years of my life, winged with happiness. This dear parent, whose health had been greatly impaired

paired before he retired, but whose exact temperance and regularity, had prolonged his life to a longer period than it could otherwise have known, began, about this time, visibly to decline. He kept the knowledge of his ill health as much from me as he could; but alas! I saw it too plainly, and the dreadful apprehension of losing him, continually haunted my imagination like some horrible ghost.

He saw my dejection, and my eyes often swelled with weeping, though I endeavoured as much as possible to conceal my grief, and many excellent arguments, drawn from the noblest sources, the dear saint used to calm my soul. Alas! his words then lost their usual effect. My love, which had always been ardent, became every day, if it was possible, greater: I could not bear to be a moment from him; every look, every word became doubly precious.

In spite of the art of the physicians, he grew worse every hour. A consultation was called, more to humour my wishes, than from any hopes entertained of benefit from their assistance: they differed in their medicinal opinions, but were unanimous in one fatal sentence, that, in all probability, a very few weeks would bound his earthly existence. My mother was present, when my father desired that, without flattery,

tery, they would inform him how long they really thought he might live, and they pronounced the above opinion; she seemed greatly affected, for she had not before imagined him in any danger. My father took that opportunity, as soon as the physicians were withdrawn, to recommend me to her affections and her care: she promised every thing he could wish, in the most solemn manner. Alas!

Harriet, too, wept over her almost dying father, and received his blessings and instructions; they then withdrew, and he sent for me: he had desired I should not be made acquainted with the physicians' opinions, that melancholy task he reserved for himself; and with all the softenings which love, and the best understanding in the world could suggest, he told it me.

Though I had long feared the worst, and the dreadful apprehension was for ever before me, still, now and then, a ray of hope would a little alleviate my grief,—what then were my feelings!—words are inadequate to describe them—I fainted away in his arms. What a scene ensued on my recovery!—It is for ever engraven on my heart.

At last, when every other argument failed, he called upon my fortitude, to enable him to support himself; declared, that death had no other sting than leaving me,

me, and leaving me so little resigned to the divine decree. That he had recommended me to my mother's tenderness, and had great hopes I might depend on her assurances; and if he could see me calm and composed, he should leave the world not only with fortitude, but joy.

The idea of rendering him easy, made me endeavour to assume a degree of calmness foreign to my heart, though I devoured my tears, suppressed my sighs, and my heart was almost bursting with the effort.

I never left him. What sleep I did take was by his bedside. Your good father, who was upon a visit to our rector, who was taken exceedingly ill just upon the arrival of his agreeable and valuable visitant, who, good naturedly, staid with him till his recovery, and performed for him the duties of his function, often kindly visited us, and was often called upon to enforce by his arguments, those which my father so ineffectually urged, to render me resigned to the dreadful stroke we every day expected.

When he awoke, the last morning of his life, I saw a great alteration in his countenance, and his eyes, which had hitherto retained their lustre, looking dim and hollow. He took my hand, and drawing it tenderly towards him, "the world recedes, My Maria, said he, a few, a very few
few

few hours more, and I leave it for ever: leave this sickly cumbrance of convulsed clay, for the realms of eternal light and glory. Extatic thought! happy hour! that exchanges these pangs for everlasting joy and bliss; why these tears and sobs, my love? you should rather congratulate, than mourn the blest release. We shall separate but a short time——for what a transient dream, a flitting shadow is life!——and then we meet never again to part.

Remember, my Maria, what I have taken so much pains to inculcate, that even in this short stage of your existence, nothing can render you happy but a life of reason and religion; it will make every distressing circumstance, every unhappy occurrence sit easy, and you will be superior to accident and misfortune. But in such a moment as *this*—rapture brightened his eyes and animated his features, he paused a moment, and then proceeded—Gracious Heaven, for *all* thy gifts I thank thee, but that thou broughtest me acquainted with sickness, with misfortunes, and distress, receive my most ardent thanksgiving: but for *them* what a wretch had I been at this moment! giddily, unheeding, dancing on the precipice of vanity and sin, my foot had slipped, and I had plunged into misery for ever.

“ Let your mother be called, my love, she has been my greatest friend, and done me the most essential service; let me see your sister likewise; the dying admonitions of a friend, those last words, when unsuspected truth and disinterestedness sits upon the lips, are generally wrote upon the memory in indelible characters.”

They both came on the summons; my sister wept, my mother wrung her hands in silent anguish; he warmly recommended me to my mother's care, then taking an hand of each, “ I sent for you both, said he, to take a last, a long farewell, and must now prepare to meet my God; with rapture, with extacy I prepare to meet him; a few more tedious hours, and angels shall conduct me to the beatific vision, to the blessed realms of immortal life, and never ending bliss. You look surprised, to find that matter of joy to me, which fills most people with horror and dread; but my sincere repentance for my youthful follies and crimes, and the life of innocence and purposed rectitude in which my latter days have passed, enables me to look up to my blessed Redeemer with hope, with joyful assurance; and, would you, my dear, wish to encounter this awful event with equal confidence, by a like conduct, disarm death of his sting and terrors: for the time must come to you as well

well as me, and Heaven alone knows how soon.

“Look at me, Harriet, a time must come, my dear child, when, like me, the pale victim of pain and sickness, you will lie gasping on the bed of death; at that awful hour, will it afford you consolation or joy, that your person was the most admired, that your dress was the most elegant, or your fortune and equipage the most splendid of all your acquaintance? Oh Harriet, Oh Mrs. Belville, reflect in the time of youth and health, what will be your thoughts, your sentiments in such a moment as this; then will your life be innocent, be useful, be virtuous; and, consequently your death be happy—I had much more to say, but my strength seems exhausted—I would be left to my repose.”

They retired, oppressed with grief, with their spirits humbled, and with sincere convictions, no doubt, of the necessity of being virtuous and good to be happy. I then approached the bed, he took my hand, and feebly grasping it, with eyes uplifted, fervently implored the blessing of Heaven on me, whilst my heart was swelled almost to bursting, to suppress the strong emotions of my grief, whilst I gazed on him with eyes expressive of the feelings of my soul. He then fell into a starting
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and

23 THE RENCONTRE; or,

and interrupted slumber, during which I indulged myself in a violent flood of tears; but soon he awoke, and again grasping my hand, he for some time fixed his dying eyes on mine, then lifting them up to Heaven, with a sigh, he seemed to breathe out his soul in silent prayer, and ——— then ——— they were closed for ever. My agony ——— I can no more.

* * * * *

I was carried to my chamber, in a state but little different from that of my dear lost father; it was sometime before I was brought to myself, and many days before my mind regained any degree of composure. My mother, on whose heart her dying husband's admonitions had made some impression, condescended to soothe my sorrow, and treated me with a true maternal tenderness: even the giddy Harriet endeavoured to alleviate my grief, and spent many hours in my chamber, in trying to amuse me.

This unusual tenderness had all its effect, upon a mind susceptible as mine; my heart overflowed with gratitude, duty, and love; I made it my whole study to oblige them, and, by every little service in my power, endeavoured to make some returns for their kindness; and, for a time, we lived in the greatest harmony ——— Alas! this halcyon was not lasting.

Though

Though I avoided company as much as possible, as my mother saw a great deal, I was obliged sometimes to appear, and had the misfortune to draw the attention of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, of a considerable fortune, upon whose heart Harriet had been some time practising in vain. He apply'd to my mother; but my sister, piqued at the preference, influenced her to give him a positive refusal. This gave me no sort of pain, as he was by no means a man I should have chosen for an husband; you know him, it was Mr. Hanway; but my mother and sister's behaviour, from the moment of his application, became totally changed towards me. I had no tender father now to fly to from their ill-treatment; and stood in need of all my fortitude, to support me from sinking into absolute despondency. My cheerfulness, which had begun to revive, now again forsook me; but melancholy they imputed to love, and made themselves exceedingly merry with the pale altered looks of the love-sick girl.

This was the state of affairs, when you, my dear Louisa, made your visit in our neighbourhood, and blessed me with a more than sisterly affection. How ineffably soothing to my melancholy, was your tender professions of friendship! how flat-

tering your solicitude to be made acquainted with my sorrows! I could not then unfold them to you. Now you have them before you. Adieu, my dearest girl, my full heart can add no more.

MARIA BELVILLE.

L E T T E R V.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

HOW soothing your friendly letter, my dear Louisa, in return for my melancholy packet! How obliging your kind invitation! with transport should I accept it, would my mother permit me,—perhaps she will, I will this moment intreat it.

There is a manner of conferring obligations, my dear, which exceedingly lightens their load, in a mind not over grateful: such a manner has—no matter—suffice it to me, that my mother has granted my request, and that I am permitted the happiness of spending one precious month with you. Next Monday, if the morning is fair, I shall set out on horseback, attended by one servant; but if it

is

TRANSITION OF A MOMENT. 31

is not fair, expect me not till the next fine morning.

I had an infinity of things to say, but will defer them till I see you, and am, my dear Louisa, ever yours,

MARIA BELVILLE.

L E T T E R VI.

Miss Harriet Belville to Miss Eliza Forster.

OH Eliza! such an adventure last night at D. Assembly! such a glorious conquest! I am an inch or two taller than I was yesterday morning.

I had luckily taken more than ordinary pains in my dress, yet I hardly knew why, as the conquests I was likely to make there were but paltry. But, I suppose, a delightful new lute string might be the inducement, and a sweet one it is; pale pink, which you know is particularly becoming to my complexion, with very small silver sprigs: pearls in my neck and hair, which I wore without powder to shew them the better, which is, however, full light to have them seen to much advantage; Maria's dark hair, I am afraid, excels mine,——no matter, it is the only thing

I have the vanity to think she excels me in, what think you, Eliza? But this is trifling with your curiosity, as I know you die to have me come to the point.

Thus adorned, my heart bent on conquest, I burst into the Assembly-room, in the full blaze of beauty. Though I was no new object to most of them, yet was all eyes turned upon me; for I was, as I intended to be, rather of the latest; and I read spite and envy in the eyes of the women, and the most flattering admiration in those of the men.

I swam to my seat, and was instantly surrounded by a croud of beaux——horrid creatures by the bye——who poured such an inundation of flattery and nonsense, on my eyes, complexion, &c. &c. &c. that, sweet as the soft breath of adulation is to the female ear, I was half sick of their fulsome compliments.

A truce, Gentlemen, I beg, said I, I am absolutely out of breath at the wonderful things you tell me; but I did not come here to sit a silent statue for admiration; let me talk a little in my turn; or have you entered into a conspiracy not to permit me to hedge in a word?

One of the pertest among them begged, for pity's sake, I would remain silent, for, if to the irresistible beauties of my person, I added

I added that of my wit, they were all irrecoverably lost.

Pho, pho, replied I, you are all safe enough; love is but an imaginary deity, and his power extends but over some hero in romance.

In that instant the little god, as if in revenge for denying his power, conveyed one of his keenest arrows in a bewitching glance from a pair of the finest blue eyes I had ever till that moment seen, that my heart being wholly unguarded to the attack, in it went up to the very feathers, and there it sticks, and I am afraid ever will: it is a barbed arrow, Eliza, and I can never have resolution to draw it.

Mean while this furious assailant at a respectful distance kept up such a continual discharge of random shot from those aforesaid divine blue eyes of his that my heart resembled—not the man in the almanack, that is a trite comparison; but did you never see a little lump of blanc-mange with two currants by way of eyes, and stuck all over with slips of almonds to make it resemble that sweet pretty creature a hedge hog?—It resembled my heart much more.

I whispered an old lady, who sat near me to know who he was; and she informed me that he was Lord Frederick Alston, only son to the Earl of Bellmour; the knowledge

of his quality redoubled my wish to enslave him, and I played off a few airs and graces, which seemed to have the desired effect; he came bowing towards me, and intreated the honour of my hand for the evening; luckily I was not engaged, and you may guess my answer.

He dances divinely; such a person! I am distracted, Eliza, to have you see him; yet take care of your heart, child; he is a dangerous object. He chatted upon a thousand subjects so lively! so degagee! whilst his bewitching eyes told me the most flattering, tender tales.

He is in mourning for his mother who is lately dead; he was upon his travels, and was sent for home at her desire to take a last embrace. He looks about twenty-two; tall, and, no effeminate beauty.

Thus you see, Eliza, I have delivered up my heart at the discretion of the conqueror, without one single article of capitulation: though if there is truth in eyes, tender sighs and soft pressures of the hand, I think I need not fear a return.

I went to the Assembly with Mrs Bennet.—I tell you things without any sort of order—for my mother is rather indisposed, and Maria is upon a visit to Dr. Ferramor's; by the by since Hanway's affair I have not been very fond of having that girl appear with me: yet why for one man's oddity

oddity should I fear her as a rival? no man in his senses can prefer her to me.

I sit now in expectation of my charming partner, whom I every moment expect. I have spared no pains in my dishabille, and hope to secure my conquest. Instantly let me have a letter of congratulation.

Stop——I thought I heard a chariot—tis he—“he comes, he comes, my Hero comes.” Adieu.

* * * * *

Again I resume the pen to tell you what a delightful visit I have had from this charming fellow: my mother is quite in raptures with him; and if she had been a few years younger, would I dare say, have had a trial of skill with me for his heart; she recollects an acquaintance with the father, whom I have a notion she used to flirt formerly with, and we are to be all so neighbourly; old friendships renewed, and all that—who knows but my mother may be a countess from my acquaintance with the son?

Lord Frederick admired the elegant appearance of the house, and my mother all obligingness led him all over it. In the library are some miniature drawings in crayons by Maria, which my father, good man, used to prize as jewels of great price; these his Lordship took great notice of, and lavished upon them very extravagant encomiums. I looked upon him; methought, in
that

that moment he was not half so handsome as he appeared before; perhaps he thought he ought to praise them because they were done by a sister of mine: in this however his Lordship is mistaken; I could very well have spared his panegyrick on *her*.

By some well placed compliments, he regained all his advantages; and at my mother's request stayed to dinner: after which the good lady very good naturedly upon some pretence leaving us alone, his Lordship made a very explicit declaration of his passion; which I, like a prudent good girl, referred to the consideration of Mamma.

He immediately sought her out, and had no occasion for much rhetoric to persuade her to approve his visits, provided they had the approbation of his father. For this he engaged, and I have a delightful prospect before me.

Once more, I say, I expect your congratulation on this important conquest; sure you might come to me; your aunt is not so ill, but you might leave her a few hours. Believe me my dear Eliza, yours sincerely,

HARRIET BELVILLE.

L. E. T.

L E T T E R VII.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

WHAT a lazy fellow thou art, Charles! not a single line have I received, in return for the enormous paquet I sent thee. Yet still I must write on, for I have to thee, a woman's pleasure in communicating a secret, and my heart has undergone a strange change lately.

Since my last, to vary the scene, and remove from objects which continually reminded us of our recent, irreparable loss; my father, and your friend, left Bellmour place, and took possession of a newly purchased estate in L—shire, upon which is a very tolerable house.

Whilst my father was planning some alterations with his steward, to divert my chagrin for a few hours; I went to an Assembly, which was held about twelve miles off at the county town; little imagining that a heart, which had come off unhurt, from the attacks of the sprightly Parisian, and soft Venetian, should find its enslaver in such an obscure place. Faith, Charles, I begin to have some belief in old sayings, Marrying and Hanging, thou knowest——no resisting destiny. But such beauty, my friend, never before met my eyes: Features!

tures! Complexion! Form!——I never saw so finished a figure. She is a Miss Belville, a very considerable fortune, it seems, —hang fortune, if I get but the woman. Fortunately she was not engaged, and I had the happiness of her hand for the evening.

As I have no reserves with my father, who ardently wishes to see me settled, as the phrase is, he was delighted with the incident; and, provided I like her as much at the second view as I did at the first, assures me of his hearty concurrence.

Not to lose any time, for such a fine creature must have an army of adorers, I posted off the moment I had breakfasted, next morning, for she lives about ten miles from us, and, by the luckiest incident in the world, was perfectly made acquainted with my charmer's character.

As I went along, I found myself exceedingly thirsty, a very unusual thing with me, and stopt at a cottage, by the way side, to beg a little milk and water; it was inhabited, I found, by a widow and two or three small children. The house, was neatness itself; and every thing about the poor woman, wore such an air of industry and content, that I could not help congratulating her, on the comfortable life she seemed to live in her little cottage.

Indeed,

Indeed, said she, Sir, I do live *very* comfortably, thanks to my heavenly benefactress.

Who is your benefactress, good woman? said I. Miss Belville, Sir, she replied; my heart bounded at the name. You know Miss Belville, then? said I.

Yes, Sir, I do know her, thank God, and so does every poor person in the parish.

The good creature, then began the panegyric of her benefactress, which did not promise a speedy conclusion; in which she crowded every good quality that adorns human nature, and which, if I had not been hastening to the said young lady, to tender her my heart and fortune, she might have continued uninterrupted till this time: but delays are always dangerous; the good woman had new-edged my wishes, tolerably ardent before; I rewarded her for her gratitude, and left her as happy as she had made me; by informing me, that the mind of my charmer was as beautiful as her person; for wholly absorbed in the transcendent charms of the one, I had not before one moment thought of the other, though of *some* consequence in a wife thou knowest, Charles.

I found the angelic creature, if possible, more lovely than the night before: she and her mother received me with the most perfect

fect politeness. I dined with them; and after dinner, having an opportunity of being alone with my charmer; I threw myself at her feet, and made her a very concise declaration of my passion. She heard me with complacence, and very prudently referred me to her mother. I flew to find out the old Lady, who, provided my father approved the matter, I find has no violent objections to my visiting her daughter.

Him I presented to them both, next day. In short, settlements are adjusted, and all that; and as soon as the cursed dilatory lawyers have finished their matters, I shall possess the finest woman in the world. She has a sister, it seems, a Maria Belville, whom I have not yet seen; but the mother informs me, she is a very different woman from Harriet. This I am sure of, that no human being can surpass her.

Adieu Charles. I am sighing to wear that noose, for which I have so often ridiculed you, so variable is the human heart.

FREDERICK ALSTON.

L E T.

L E T T E R VIII.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

THIS Maria Belville, is really a very lovely girl. I found her very different from the picture I had formed of her, in my imagination, from the sister's, and mother's description.

I was chatting with them, this afternoon, when she entered in a very genteel riding dress, which became her infinitely; her hair, which is remarkably fine, of a dark chesnut, was shewn to advantage by her little grey beaver; her complexion, which does not seem to want rouge, was heightened by riding and the warmth of the weather, into the most beautiful glow I ever saw; her whole figure, which is indeed rather too small, is elegance itself; and her face, though in symmetry of features it falls infinitely short of her sister's, is rendered more interesting from an expression of sense, vivacity, and good humour. Her eyes, I think, are the finest I ever saw, black, sparkling, and expressive.

She entered with inimitable grace, approached her mother, with an air of reverence and awe, who coldly saluted her cheek. She then turned to her sister, and with a look of affection, took her hand, and enquired

enquired after her health. Harriet withdrew her hand, with an air of scorn, and the most chilling look, and scarcely vouchsafed a reply.

She then, with graceful ease, addressed herself to me, we quickly fell into conversation, in which, after some minutes sullen silence, Harriet and her mother joined.

Maria happening to mention her father, whose favourite I find she was, as Harriet is evidently her mother's; Mrs. Belville, caught at the word "your father!" and with a countenance inflamed with anger, said, "you may think yourself happy, child, that he is not now alive; to be a witness to your undutiful, your unworthy behaviour, which is likely to be a disgrace to the education he gave you."

A disgrace! repeated Maria, with a look of astonishment, I know not what you mean, Madam.

Oh, when we are alone, replied the other, I shall explain myself more fully.

Whatever it is, my dear Madam, said with great earnestness, the amiable girl; I intreat you will explain yourself before this gentleman, who has heard me accused of undutifulness and unworthiness, that he may not think I shall disgrace the family he is going to be allied to.

There is no occasion to trouble Lord Frederick, with family bickerings, replied Mrs. Belville; but since you urge the matter

ter with so much saucy freedom, you know well that I forbade your ever seeing Mr. Hanway again, yet in opposition to my express commands, you have received his visits, answered his letters.—

Pardon my interrupting you madam, said Maria; but when you commanded me not to *see* him, I did not understand you in the strict and literal sense of the word; for then I must have discontinued visiting every person in the neighbourhood, as he visits with freedom every family we do: but by not *seeing* him, I understood, not seeing him as a *lover*; not encouraging his addresses, which I declare upon my honour.

Then you did not see him at Miss Fermor's as a *lover*, drawled out Harriet, interrupting her, though he visited there almost every day? you well-read people have *nice* distinctions!

Indeed I did not, sister, he visited there often, it is true; but it was not for me to direct Miss Fermor in the choice of her company. I had no business; it would have appeared insufferably vain and foolish in me to place his visits to my account; and I defy the most malicious perverter of words, to construe my conversations with him into encouragement of his addresses.

But you received many letters from him, Miss, said Mrs. Belville.

I did, Madam, and returned them back unopened. Had I thought Mr. Hanway, the

the most amiable man on earth, your commands, Madam, would have determined me to give him up: but I declare, though I think him a very worthy man, he is so little to my taste, that, on the contrary, had you approved his addresses, and commanded me to marry him, I should have obeyed you with infinite reluctance; so that where duty and inclinations so strongly coincide, it is very improbable I should be disobedient. But at the same time that I utterly discourage his hopes as a lover, is it absolutely necessary I should treat him with incivility and rudeness? surely, added she, smiling, politeness at least is due to the man, who, preferring me to others infinitely more worthy, generously offers me his heart, and a splendid fortune.

Harriet coloured: the mother called her pert and conceited; and desired, that for the future, she would allow *her* to direct the manner of her behaviour; for sure, with her knowledge of the world, she was as good a judge of delicacy and propriety, as any Miss of seventeen.

The amiable girl, to this foolish speech replied with an air of great respect; that if she had either disobeyed, or offended, it was from misapprehension alone, and not perverseness; that she was exceedingly sorry, and begged her pardon.

The entrance of a servant, with the tea equipage, put an end to this curious conversation,

versation, which discovered my adorable Harriet somewhat spiteful and malicious: the mother too, had exhibited herself in quite a new light.

Maria was commanded, rather than desired, to pour out the tea, which she did with great ease and cheerfulness: but Mrs. Belville, seemed determined to mortify her, though her other attempt had proved ineffectual: after looking at her for some time, I do verily think with envy and spite at the exceeding pretty appearance she made,

Lord, child, she cried, how immoderately fat you are grown!

Do you think so, Madam? she replied with a smile.

Yes, indeed, I do—out of all form and shape; and your face too, what a frightful colour! the vulgar daub of a country milk maid!

Then, Madam, said she, handing her tea with great composure; were I in France, it would save the expence of rouge.

No, child; rouge is quite another colour, I assure you.

I could not help joining in this opinion, and saying, no art in the universe could, in any manner, equal the beautiful paintings of health and youth.

To this, Mrs. Belville replied, with a toss of the head, that some people's taste was exceedingly odd: but, added she, cooling her
tea

tea with her spoon, I assure you, Maria, I never saw any body more altered for the worse, in so short a time; if you do not take more care of yourself, you will grow a perfect fright, and I shall be quite ashamed of you.

I should be sorry, Madam, replied the sweet girl, with a smile, you should be ashamed of me for what is not in my power to help. Harriet is too exquisitely handsome to need a foil, or I should answer that purpose exceedingly well; but, added she, though I imagined it impossible her beauty could have received any improvement, yet I do think her, in the time, as much altered for the better, as you, Madam think I am changed for the worse.

This well-timed compliment, put us all into tolerable temper again; and as my father expected some company, I left them soon after; but I cannot say, with great complacency; Harriet's manner to her sister, disgusted me much; I have thought of little else. Adieu.

L E T T E R IX.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

A CCEPT, my dearest girl, my most grateful acknowledgments for the many happy hours you have added to my life. How much am I indebted to your friendship and polite attention! did I ever think two months of felicity would have fallen to my share? Alas, they are gone! the joyous hours are glided from me for ever, and nothing remains but their pleasing remembrance. Had my mind been at ease my ride home had been a most delightful one: but the birds sung unheard, the flowers bloomed unseen, the verdant lawn, the embowering shade alike unheeded, and absorbed in my own disagreeable reflections, I was insensible to the variety of enchanting scenes around. So absent was I, that I started when the servant opened the gate of the court-yard—surprized to find myself at home.

My reception was the same as usual—cool.—Why am I always hurt at what I have all my life-time been used to? and why did I feel so acutely at that moment? Was it that I had been treated by the dear friends I had left, with such unmerited kindness and attention, that it had added

new

new softness to the natural sensibility of my temper?

My sister's new lover was with her, whom we heard of, Lord Frederick Alston, who is a most graceful figure of a man indeed, and his mind seems as accomplished as his person is charming: My sister appears with great reason delighted with her conquest. She has hitherto been much better humour'd to me than common; and her beauty I think is increasing with her self-satisfaction. They will be a lovely couple; he is, I must repeat, a most amiable man; and Harriet ought to think her self happy in being distinguished by such a one.

Adieu, my dearest Louisa, and believe me most gratefully and affectionately yours,

MARIA BELVILLE.

L E T T E R X.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

YOU chide me, my dearest Louisa, for not writing. Alas! I have no entertaining subjects for my pen; and why should I, by my melancholy, sadden the mind of my friend. My letters would insensibly slide into the disagreeable stile of complaint; I might

might be tempted perhaps to arraign the conduct of a mother, and condemn a partiality which imbitters my life. I think I ought not—I will not complain—our loves and aversions are involuntary—the impulse of nature not the dictates of reason—Reason bids us esteem, revere, and honour; but love has its birth, from certain *agréments*—an undefined sympathy of soul—a thousand nameless somethings, which play about the heart, and take it by an agreeable caprice. Ought I then to blame my mother, for an aversion, which is not perhaps in her power to resist?—which began with my life, and which, alas! will probably end but with it? I lament it as a misfortune; but let no bitter reflections on the sacred, maternal character burst from my lips, or flow from my pen.

Indeed, when I consider seriously, my loss, I find, has been but little—my gain great. To my mother's neglect, am I indebted for my father's attention; and loth should I be to exchange his invaluable precepts, for Harriet's superficial accomplishments. I have been taught patience, humility, and benevolence;—what then would this wayward sighing heart? would it forego solid advantages, virtues of *eternal* moment, which flourish only in the cypress shade of affliction, for kind looks, encouraging smiles, and gentle answers? I

ought to be satisfied—that is too cold a word—to be *thankful*, that I have not, by an ill judged fondness, by an unlimited indulgence of all my passions, been rendered vain, capricious and envious—painful sensations, if I may judge of them from their effects!

My part, indeed, under the controul of one of Harriet's temper, is difficult enough to support; for under her controul I am; my mother is wholly governed by her whims, sees with her eyes, and resents with her passions. If I aim at any excellencies, the effort is the subject of ridicule; if our visitants make me any compliment, it is tauntingly repeated a month afterwards; if I am grave, I am sullen; if gay, pert.

I own, sometimes this treatment frets me more than it ought; but, in general, it awakens more pity than resentment in my breast, and it grieves me to see her mind the sport of passion and caprice. She does *sometimes* vex me, but *constantly* torments herself; and is, with the finest person in the world and an affluent fortune, one of the most miserable of human beings.

The presence of Lord Frederick, who is a constant visitor is some restraint upon her ill-humour; but she makes me suffer, when he is gone, for the polite attentions his good nature pays me; her petulance has not indeed broke out before him in words,

words, but frequently flushes in her cheek and sparkles in her eye: she treats me, before him, with a kind of sarcastic sneer, and an air of contempt. My mother, you know could never hide *her* dislike; it strikes every stranger; and his Lordship often looks at me with an eye of pity, when she is *very* unkind.

I always reply with humility, when I cannot keep silence, without imputation of fullness; and if I find my temper rising, leave the room, upon the first decent pretence; for never will I be provoked to a saucy, or insolent answer. She is my *mother*——intituled by that sacred name, to all my reverence; and never can *her* want of affection——which I look upon as an unhappy prejudice she cannot surmount, absolve me from performing *my* duty. If I have not her affection, I will at least try to deserve it; and who knows but in time my perseverance may conquer? Should I not be successful, the consciousness of acting right will be my support. Adieu, my dearest friend; may you ever be happy, is the prayer of your

MARIA BELVILLE

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L E T

L E T T E R XI.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

THIS Maria, is a divine girl; why has not her sister that bewitching vivacity, that enchanting sweetness, those thousand unspeakable graces, which render her most trivial words and actions interesting?—But she would then be too charming. Providence has distributed its gifts to the sex more equally than we, at first sight, imagine; some are blessed with beauty, without understanding; some understanding without beauty; some with riches, as an equivalent for both; but wit, beauty, sense, and riches united, is————a divinity I never beheld.

Not that I would have you imagine, though she is much inferior to her sister in the beauties of her person, that Maria is, by any means, a plain girl; her features are small, her complexion good, with beautiful teeth and hair, and the finest, and most expressive eyes in the world—I believe I gave you her picture before——no matter; yet was her face downright ugly, the elegance of her form, and the grace of her manner, must always make her an interesting object.

The

TRANSITION OF A MOMENT.

The lawyers are at work, and things go on swimmingly; but—I do not know how it is, Charles,—I cannot say I feel myself so *transported*, as the near prospect of my happiness with Harriet would have made me a month ago.—I do not like her temper, she treats her sister with insolence and ill humour, which the other bears with the most unruffled sweetness—I wish I had not been so precipitant; you have often told me, my impatient temper would be its own punishment; how didst thou attain the spirit of prophecy, Charles? for I have certainly gone too far to recede with honour; and shall be punished for my hasty choice with a vengeance. My Father's heart is warmly in the match, and is lavish in his encomiums of Harriet; but he has not yet seen Maria; as he went a day or two, before she came home to his seat, in B—shire, upon some business, and is not yet returned, but I expect him in a few days.

Poor girl! it shocks me to see the manner in which her mother treats her; for as I am looked upon as one of the family, she does not attempt to dissemble her dislike. If Harriet had a grain of good nature, she would endeavour to soften her mother's harshness; or if she found her efforts to do so ineffectual, would, by the tenderness of her own manner, try in some measure to

compensate for it; but on the contrary— for I can see through the flimsy veil she endeavours to shroud her malignance in; the warmth of her temper, makes her but an ill dissembler—her aim is rather to heighten, than alleviate her mother's ill-humour.

I am utterly at a loss, sometimes, how to behave among them. Mrs. Belville and Harriet affect to treat Maria's refined sense as romantic flight and absurdity: and look at me, when they have vented some foolish, ill-natured sarcasm, as if they expected my approbation. I always endeavour, by some unmeaning pleasantry, to give a turn to the conversation; but am scarcely able to conceal my contempt. How she supports it as she does, is astonishing; to her mother, her manner is humility itself; she receives her bitter taunts, as friendly reproofs; and though I have frequently seen her sensibility wounded, and the silent tear swelling in her eye, never have I seen anger or resentment flush on her cheek, or dictate one peevish reply. To her sister she assumes a greater freedom of behaviour; an easy, playful condescension, which has dignity in it; appears to look upon her ill-nature with pity, and turns off her pointed sarcasms with some mild reply or good-natured pleasantry.

I was

I was inexpressibly hurt for her the other day: Maria has a beautiful little spaniel, which was a favourite of her father's, and for that reason, she is exceedingly fond of it; but it is very seldom suffered to make its appearance in the parlour, because the same reason which occasions her fondness, renders it the aversion of her mother and Harriet. Maria had been taking a walk, and this little animal with her; it followed her, without her perceiving it, into the room where we were all sitting, and instantly jumping into Harriet's lap, tore a fine apron which she had on.

She threw the creature from her with a violence which set it screaming; and, with the voice and air of a fury, insisted that it should be immediately hanged; abused her sister's fondness for it, enumerated the many mischievous tricks it had played her; and again, on the footman's appearance, upon the furious ringing of the bell, insisted upon his immediately dispatching it.

The mother was as violent as the daughter, and an immediate execution would have followed this hasty judgment, in spite of Maria's gentle remonstrances and promises it should no more offend, enforced with a flow of tears which she was unable to repress, had I not taken upon myself the office of mediator, and begged of Maria to give me, and Mrs. Belville's permission to

receive, the innocent author of all this uproar.

This interposition, I saw, displeased Harriet and her mother; they however gave me leave, though not very graciously, to do what I pleased with the creature; but Maria's look—for she spoke not—amply repaid me for their displeasure; never shall I forget that glance——It is a beautiful little animal, I am grown immoderately fond of it; it is my constant companion, when I am at home, and sleeps upon a cushion in my chamber every night.

You yawn, Charles, at these, to you, dull, uninteresting matters; but they are not so to me, my friend; since from trifles, when the heart is more unguardedly open than in important affairs, one is enabled with certainty to develope its inmost folds——the discovery makes me mad.

What a strange variable animal art thou! exclaims your worship; this moment distracted for one sister, the next dying for the other——No, I think it is not yet come to that; I *esteem* Maria only——a placid friendship—nothing more, I believe, upon my honour; but I certainly despise her sister heartily; a comfortable foundation for a happy marriage!——I detest the thought—but how with honour to avert the impending evil!——thy genius, fruitful in expedients, may perhaps point the way.

way. Dear boy, think upon the subject, and waft quickly to me, with the next packet, thy fruit of the cogitations. Adieu.

L E T T E R XII.

Charles Seymour, Esq; to Lord Frederick Alston.

I SWEAR by Jupiter, friend Frederick, that with all my whims, oddities, and caprices about me, call them which you will, I have afforded you a decent variety of names. I could not have conducted myself in a more odd, whimsical, and capricious manner than a certain friend of mine that shall be nameless. Heavens and earth! with his experience of the sex, to fall in love with a baby face at an assembly; fly to her next morning, and without knowing one single turning or winding of her soul, one single native sentiment or inclination, offer himself and fortune at the idol's feet! By my faith I have no patience! it was a conduct unworthy of the raw son of some booby country 'squire, fresh from the boarding school. This was precipitancy with a vengeance. How often—but no matter. Oh! I had forgot; a prating old dame gave your angelic a divine character, and the dignity of the evidence accelerated

the declaration; have you had a second conference with the hag that your evil genius planted by the road-side to destroy your future peace? possibly she mistook one sister for the other; and whilst she meant to deify Maria, you mistook her goddess for your own idol: Ask her—— yet to what purpose? it will afford you small consolation now, to find you were then deceived, now that the mischief is almost irreparable; upon my soul, I am afraid it is; for I cannot see how you can be off with honour.

But don't in the mean time, my friend, deceive yourself, and fancy that you feel no more than a placid friendship for the amiable Maria; a much warmer passion lurks in your bosom, believe me.

Let me die if I know what to advise you, not a single scheme offers itself to my stupid brain, harrassed to death as I am with a party of noisy English gentlemen, who are hurrying me to Fontainebleau with them, whether I consent or not. I was unwilling to lose a post, though I could tell you nothing more than my desire, but at the same time my inability, to serve you. I will consider the matter, and write again in a day or two. Adieu.

L E T.

L E T T E R XIII.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

YOUR satire is just, my friend, and so I am afraid is your opinion; I will *not* deceive myself. My feelings for Maria certainly deserve a tenderer appellation than friendship; but it gives me pain, at this juncture, to enquire too minutely into the emotions of my heart, and I find it more easy to obey its dictates with the implicit duty of a slave, than presumptuously pry into the reason of its imperial commands. This disinclination looks badly, and I am playing the fool at a miserable rate. Every day increases my difficulties, and, what is infinitely worse, I am afraid the unhappiness of my—indulge me the expression, for rapture is in the thought——alas! it will never be——*My Maria.*

I have hurt Harriet's vanity by my assiduity to her sister. Not that she has sense or humility enough to suppose that Maria can have stolen a heart from her; but she expects, where she is, no eyes or ears but for herself; her ill-humour to her sister is therefore increased, because she perceives she shares some part of my attention; and Mrs. Belville, who is wholly governed by Harriet's caprice, makes, I

am afraid, Maria's life very uncomfortable.

The lawyers, thanks to the habitual dilatoriness of their profession, move very slowly; but, Oh Charles! the time *must* come; no coward ever dreaded the hour of combat more than I do the eclaireissement of my inclinations. I am firmly determined never to wed Harriet——yet my father doats upon the match, and, you know, my cursed folly gave rise to that dotage; fine person, fine fortune; my wife head thought no farther.

Maria has not a shilling independent of her mother; and, were I to declare off with Harriet for the sake of Maria, unless my father would consent to the change, which, with his notions of honour, is highly improbable; I would only embroil the dear creature with these fiends, and render her situation intolerable. True I could fly with her into Scotland, and secure her from their ill-usage by marriage; but, my father's tenderness, his hitherto unlimited indulgence, merits not such a return; and, whatever my heart suffers, I never will enter into matrimony without his full consent.

Something, however, must quickly be done to break off the fetters my folly and precipitation have forged, without their perceiving what share Maria bears in it; and
in

in some distant period——heaven avert it should be *very* distant——I may find an opportunity of gratifying every wish of my soul by calling her mine.

My father's notions of honour are too precise and literal for me upon this occasion; he would tell me, that I am absolutely engaged to Harriet by as sacred a tie as if the ceremony had already passed, and no wandering passion should be suffered to break through it; that, if I am sensible to any such, the utmost force of my reason should be exerted to subdue its influence; and that I should submit to the greatest tortures, rather than fully that honour, which ought to be infinitely dearer than life itself.

“This is the language of the man awake,” this the advice which reason gives to the passions of *others*; those passions to which we are no longer sensible ourselves, or forget in the present calm of our souls their ungovernable controul. But I must have liberty to refine a little upon these fine lectures, and tell him, that, though I vow'd to Harriet I was desperately in love with her, I acted no deceitful part, I actually felt all I professed for what I *imagined* to be her, and *she* was the deceiver, not *me*.

I saw she was all fair, I *thought* her all goodness, sweetness, and sensibility. She dropt

dropt the pleasing mask, and I my love of consequence. It was not the same person with whom I fell in love, whom I courted for a wife, whose consent I obtained; a fiend started up in her stead, and shocked my soul into disgust. Her sister *really* possesses those amiable qualities Harriet only *assumed*, and it is therefore to *her* those vows, I mistakingly made, were due. Can I in honour give my hand to Harriet, when my heart is devoted to her sister? Should I not by so doing render her more miserable, if she has any delicacy, and discovers she possesses not my affections, than I can possibly now do by declining an honour, which thousands of superior quality and fortune would embrace with transport? —It would be doing her great injustice. I therefore in honour, compassion, justice, must give her up; and the most refined partisans for honour must be of the same opinion, nor think it reasonable that if a man makes his addresses to a lady, from a mistaken opinion of her character, and after the formalities of settlements, &c. are agreed to, he perceives that in her mind, which will, upon a nearer connection, make him miserable, he is still obliged to have her.

I think both sexes have a right to decline the engagement upon such discoveries, as the union without mutual esteem, if not love, must render both miserable.

Having

Having settled this account with my conscience I am something easier; my next consideration shall be how to break with the lady. I cannot tell her, "Madam, you have deceived me; I have found you ill-natured, insolent, and foolish; you are not the person calculated to make me happy; I no longer love you, am too honest to dissemble; must therefore beg permission to take my leave." Unworthy as she is, I cannot shock her with even the implication of such sentiments; vanity, such as hers, is easily alarmed; I must offend, and give her the merit of dismissing me.

But whilst I am thus freeing myself from one engagement, in the hope of being able to enter into another, the dear Maria may, by some pretender, be snatched from me; she has had many admirers; the mother may select one among them to take off what she thinks a hateful incumbrance; and she, friendless and helpless as she is, would find it impossible to resist the inhuman controul. Or her affections may be engaged —— distraction is in the idea —— yet how can I expect, whom she imagines will shortly be married to her sister, any share but that of a brother in them? I would give worlds, were they in my possession, to know her sentiments of me. She behaves to me with the innocent playfulness and freedom of a sister. Alas! if

she

she loved me, hopeless as her passion must appear, that constant chearfulness, that placid air would vanish. She calls me brother with apparent delight. No hopes, Charles, no hopes for your unhappy friend; and, all angel as she is, and fondly as my soul doats on her, was she to offer me her hand, I would not accept it, unless I was certain of her heart. I never will marry a woman I cannot love; nor will I ever marry one, whom I have not all the reason in the world to think loves me. I intend, whenever I marry, to be a pattern of conjugal fidelity and affection; but then, mutual love must be the foundation on which to erect them.

I am very whimsical and *outrée* in my opinions; as for instance, I have the oddest notions concerning vows, the marriage vow particularly; and think that so solemn an appeal to the Deity, in a place set apart for his worship, is sometimes *more* than matter of form and ceremony, and that it ought literally to be kept.

I would not hazard these uncouth opinions to every body; but you I know think seriously *sometimes*, and will not laugh at me *very* much.

Adieu, my friend, believe me ever yours.

L. E. T.

L E T T E R XIV.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

GLORIOUS news, Charles! Madam Fortune, in one of her most gracious moods, or the interposition of my better genius, or——but I shall give myself no further trouble to investigate by what good-humoured agency that is likely to be effected, which the utmost reach of my invention was inadequate to.

Many schemes had presented themselves, and were all rejected, as not being sufficiently delicate, where a Lady's vanity was to be gratified, and yet gently disappointed. When that fop, Lord Moreton made me a visit, from a small seat he has lately purchased near us, by way of sporting seat; not that he has any taste for field diversions, for they are too robust for so delicate a frame; but because it is fashionable for our nobility to leave the fine old mansions of their ancestors, and shut themselves up, in some little thatched hovel, with their mistress, their dogs, and their game-keepers.

He found me just stepping into my phaeton, with an intention of visiting at Belville-place, and politely enough insisted upon not disappointing me and my friends,
by

by detaining me from my excursion; and added, that if it would not be thought an impertinent intrusion, he should wish to accompany me, as he wanted to make some acquaintance in the neighbourhood; I hesitated not a moment, he mounted by my side and off we drove.

We were very graciously received by Harriet. Moreton splendidly dressed in a suit, just imported from Paris; that, and his title, I saw had amazing effect; and she displayed all the arts of a finished coquette; in short, behaved in such a style, that had I loved her, it would have given me the utmost uneasiness; they had all the conversation to themselves, which ran upon the most fashionable trifles.

Maria seemed to have no ambition to shine in the eyes of the beau; but sat silently attentive, every now and then looking at me, as if to discover the effects of her sister's behaviour; finding no appearance of violent uneasiness, we entered into an agreeable chit chat; and the two lovers, for such they appeared, entertained each other without interruption; and indeed it would be a thousand pities to part them, for their minds appear the very counterpart of each other.

We made a late visit, Moreton was loth to part from his charmer; and Maria was in such delightful spirits, that I felt infinite reluctance

reluctance at leaving her. Moreton had ordered his carriage to come for him, and its superb appearance, with his train of servants, for he always moves in state, completed, I doubt not, the conquest of Harriet's heart.

He has visited there, I hear, every day since; I likewise go very often, and we have met: we are at present exceedingly civil; how long it will last, I am not able to say. When I think matters ripe enough, I shall assume some airs upon the occasion. Adieu.

L E T T E R X V.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

MY father is returned, and accompanied me yesterday to Mrs. Belville's, where we found Harriet, her mother, and Moreton, sitting in the tea room; Harriet dressed to the greatest advantage, looked indeed very lovely, and displayed all her attractions with great art. Moreton gazed on her with rapture, my father beheld her with admiration, and had I not known how little the mind was worthy the person, my heart had probably returned to its allegiance; when in swam the sweet Maria, to claim her captive.

My

My father had never before seen her. Her elegant figure, the polite, the sensible, the graceful manner in which she received, and returned the compliments he made her, appeared to strike him. We entered into a lively conversation, and then it is, that this syren becomes dangerous; the most harmonious voice in the world, uttering with laughing, unstudied ease, the wittiest thoughts, the justest sentiments, in a language which might vie with the celebrated Bolingbroke for elegance, no one can listen to with impunity.

Add to all these, a person—not in the eye of the painter beautiful—but delicate, elegant, and graceful to excess. I believe I have said before, that if her face had been the homeliest in the world, there would have been no resisting the charms of her manner; there is something so peculiarly graceful, such an excessive—I do not know what to call it; prettyness is a poor word—in her most trivial actions, that is enchanting.

My father had too much sensibility to behold so many charms, without admiration; methought his eyes upbraided me for the folly of my choice. The two sisters displayed in the most striking manner, the different powers of beauty and grace. “A woman, says an elegant author, can be beautiful but one way; but she may be
“ graceful

“graceful a thousand.” We had gazed upon Harriet’s fine form, eyes, hair, lips, teeth and complexion—it was all beauty to excess. She had varied her attitudes ; we had viewed her charms in every becoming light—they were still the same ; that insipid sameness appeared likewise in her conversation ; she is no idiot ; but her whole attention, ever since she was able of thinking, has been engrossed by her person ; and her education having extended very little farther than to exhibit it to the best advantage, her stock of ideas is miserably scanty, and her conversation frivolous and impertinent.

But Maria relieved us, when our attention was wearied for want of variety ; she talked, and charmed us with her wit, she played, and sung, and enraptured our souls with the melodious sounds ; how insipid, how lifeless and contemptible, was the mere beauty of Harriet ! Moreton had not taste enough to feel the difference ; but my father was enchanted ; and were he younger, I should be very much inclined to be jealous of his raptures. Maria appeared charmed with him, and exceedingly assiduous to gain his esteem ; and she has indeed succeeded, for he has talked of nothing else ever since.

He does not altogether approve of Harriet’s apparent fondness for Moreton ; but
says,

says, that all fine women are coquettes, and we must excuse constitutional failings. He talks of having a ball, and inviting all the neighbourhood, for the sake of dancing with his favourite Maria.

All this looks exceedingly well for me; and he will the less wonder at my change, now he has seen and felt her enchantments; his observing Harriet's coquetry too, is no unlucky circumstance. In short, my friend, I think I discern a distant dawn of happiness. Could I but know how Maria's heart stands affected towards me——yet I dare not give the most remote hint of my inclinations, engaged as she thinks me to her sister——her delicacy would be wounded.

I have this consolation, however, that though I have no reason to flatter myself with having made any impression on her heart, I cannot perceive any symptoms in favour of any other person; for I watch every look, every glance, every turn of her expressive countenance. There was a Mr. Hanway, whom her mother took her to task for seeing, contrary to her injunctions, the first time I saw her; this man, I have sometimes hinted to her as a secret favorite; but the dear creature is generally angry with me, when I mention him, and warmly disclaims all inclination towards him; She is determined, she says, never to marry. Dear girl, hold that resolution,

solution, till I have it in my power to offer my hand; and then may my love afford sufficient eloquence, to persuade you to alter your mind!

Believe me, my dear Charles, your friend sincerely.

L E T T E R XVI.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

WE have had our entertainment, which concluded with a ball. My father has an exceeding good taste, and every thing was conducted with elegance and decorum. We had a large company, this is a genteel neighbourhood; but the Belville family, as you may suppose, stood foremost upon the occasion.

Harriet had engaged her hand to Moreton, which, you will allow, was very extraordinary. My father had intended to dance with Maria, but I hinted, that Mrs. Belville, would probably think herself neglected; he offered her his hand almost as reluctantly, as I should have done myself; which she received with great complacency, and displayed abundance of coquetish airs upon the occasion. She is still a fine woman, which she is perfectly conscious of,
and

and I verily believe, formed a design to enslave her partner.

All obstacles thus removed, I approached the adorable Maria, had the happiness of finding her not engaged, and we were inseparable for the evening; her dress was elegant simplicity itself; whilst her sister was loaded with ornaments, and apparently dressed for conquest. Harriet dances finely, but Maria inimitably. Country dances are favorable for lovers; a thousand little liberties, insignificant to the indifferent, give transport to the inamorato.

Maria was in charming spirits, and her innocent gaiety gave me confidence. I suffered my eyes to speak the soft emotions of my soul——methought hers was not altogether silent. I pressed her hand, gloved as it was, and with an air of thoughtless vivacity, that she might think me in jest or not, as she pleased.—I dared not venture too much; I cursed its envious interposition, tore it off, and glued the soft yielding wax to my lips.

With a sigh——yes Charles, with a *sigh* she withdrew it; called me gay, giddy creature, and rejoined the dance. But whether afraid of me, or herself, I know not; she would not suffer me to draw her aside after this; her sweet face assumed a more serious air, and awed me into prudence.

It was late when the company left us, and we retired; but I slept not; the gentle rebuff I had received, proved her sensibility; her sigh—upon what trivial foundation does a lover build his hopes!—I am determined another day shall not fly over my head, till I have come to an eclaireissement with Harriet; her engaging herself to dance with Lord Moreton, in the apparent state of our affairs, sufficiently declares her inclinations.—I hope I shall not precipitate matters—this suspense is intolerable—I will bear it no longer; but as soon as I think they will be ready to receive me, I will know my doom.

* * * * *

Every thing, my dear Charles, has succeeded to my wishes; Maria walked out, and I found Mrs. Belville and Harriet by themselves; it was too early I suppose for Moreton's morning visit. I assumed a great appearance of ill-humour, at being disappointed in the honour of dancing with her, and rudely enough threw out some pointed sarcasms on her coquetry. This, as I intended, piqued them both; they replied as tartly, and with an affected prudence declared, that I had discovered so much jealousy and ill-humour in my disposition, that happiness was not to be expected with me. Far as matters

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had

had gone between us, Mrs. Belville said, she could not with any patience think of her daughter being sacrificed to the punctilio of fulfilling those engagements.—She was happy I had discovered my temper, before it was too late.—In short, gave me to understand, I was to entertain no further hopes of Harriet; and I saw, what I did suppose would be the case, that they were equally eager with myself, to catch at the first opportunity of setting aside our engagements; certain of this, I pretended great sorrow and contrition; but they were inflexible in their prudential sentiments. But Mrs. Belville said, that, though as a *lover*, I had nothing farther to hope; as a *friend* they should be always happy to see me; and, with an affected simper, enquired after my father.

Her design is evident enough, she has a passion for coronets, and would willingly die a countess. My father, I believe, is very safe from her allurements; but I am glad this scheme has entered her head, as it will keep up for the present a friendly intercourse between the families; without which, I should have been strangely puzzled to have seen Maria.

I took my leave with as dejected an air as I could possibly assume, and met Maria in the court yard returning from her walk.

I stopt

I stopt to enquire after her health, and whether she had not caught cold from dancing; but the place we were in forbade any further conversation. I just hinted, that I had been treated ill by her sister, and had received my final dismissal as a lover.

The dear girl looked surprized, and I was going to add something expressive of the state of my mind, when my servant brought my horse, and gave a very disagreeable interruption. My eyes were obliged to do the office of my tongue.—I am afraid they were not sufficiently expressive, yet I endeavoured to make them as eloquent as possible.

My father, I am afraid, is not well; I found him so entirely out of spirits, that I would not disturb him with the rebuff I have met with.

Adieu, my friend, I expect your congratulations.

L E T T E R XVII:

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

OH Charles! I am rendered the most wretched of human beings. I told you in the conclusion of my last, that my father

was out of spirits. For two days his melancholy increased to such a degree as alarmed me greatly. I fatigued him with enquiries after his health, devoted my whole time to his amusement, and summoned all the vivacity I was master of to enliven his features with a smile; but had the pain to find my assiduities troublesome to him; all efforts to amuse and divert ineffectual, and that he preferred solitude to my company.

I was exceedingly unhappy; for he is the best and tenderest of parents, the most amiable of men, and the most affectionate of friends. In spite of all my arts, he seemed every hour to grow worse, and his frequent sighs, I thought, indicated something heavy upon his mind. I was loth to be impertinently prying; but at last his excess of melancholy drove me to seek the reason, that I might use my utmost efforts to relieve it.

I questioned him first at a distance; but he eluded my hints, and I was obliged to speak plain. I told him how unhappy his uneasiness and reserve made me; that I was apprehensive that I had inadvertently offended him, as he, in this instance, refused me his confidence—reminded him that he had always called upon me to regard him in the light of friend more than parent, and in his bosom to repose all my
griefs;

griefs; but that it was impossible that friendship could be perfect, where the confidence was not reciprocal, and he refused me my share of his.

Alas! my dear Frederick, said he, with a heavy sigh, press me no farther; the testimonies which I every moment receive of your tenderness give me pain—I cannot unburthen myself—you would hate and despise me.

Hate and despise my father!—my friend!—what words are these?—for heaven's sake, Sir, explain yourself.

Suppose me the most foolish, the weakest of mortals.

The supposition is impossible—my heart refuses it entrance.

It is, however, but too true. Oh! Frederick, I have suffered this foolish heart to become enamoured——

Thank God it is no worse, interrupted I. In love! is that all?—with some prudent good lady, I dare say—I have no objection to a mother-in-law, if it conduces to your happiness.

Ah! Frederick, there is my folly, the object is such an one as will make you despise me, and render me the jest of all my acquaintance.

Impossible, my lord, you cannot love deformity or idiotism! you have too good

a taste to be in love with your cook-maid.

Ah, said he, my *taste* will be unquestioned, "she is all that youthful poets fancy when they love"—but—such a *girl*.

This startled me a little—Well, Sir, so as she does but please you, and make you happy—But she has a name?

What will you say when I tell you 'tis—'tis—he hesitated.

Out with it, Sir.

Maria Belville.

Gracious heavens! it was too much. I gasped for breath. At last, Maria Belville! my lord, I exclaimed.

Ah! said he, my son, I see—I see I have shocked you. From the first moment I saw her, my heart was devoted to her, almost without my perceiving it; till the charm which held me, became too powerful to break through. I have made great efforts—I have used every argument which reason and prudence could suggest—the injustice which I must, by such a marriage, do the most affectionate, the most amiable of sons, the ridicule of the world—all have been ineffectual—The conflict has been too much for me, and, I believe, my constitution will sink under it.

Who could hear all this unmoved? His generous conflict overcame all my selfish passions:

passions : in that moment I forgot my own happiness ; but as it centered in his—used every argument to reconcile him to himself, and offered to use the interest I had in the family in his behalf. Conscious that my first reception of the intelligence had hurt him, and apprehensive he should suspect the cause, I was more zealous in my arguments, and more liberal of my offers of service, than I should otherwise perhaps have been ; for I knew well the delicacy and generosity of his soul, and that if he had known the state of my heart, he would have died a thousand deaths rather than been the occasion of making me miserable ; but I was determined not to be out-done in generosity ; never shall he know it—it will be the highest consolation, amidst my unhappiness, to reflect that I have sacrificed my own to his felicity.

By my arguments and soothing, his mind by degrees regained its usual composure—he beheld me with more than a parent's fondness, called me by every endearing name, and I was sensible to a more exquisite delight, in the consciousness of acting right, than I never experienced in the fullest fruition of sensual pleasure.

But *now* that I am retired to unbother myself—Now that the glow of passion is subsided—alas ! I am sinking into mere

mortality again—my heroism is flown, and I am—most wretched.

Oh! Charles, thus to be torn from every prospect of bliss!—Her marriage with another might have been supported by a distant hope that death would have enabled her to make a second choice; but here—wherever I turn, despair and horror meet my eye—I dare not wish for her love—dare not indulge my own—sin and damnation were the inevitable consequence—I must fly the kingdom. I have not yet acquainted my father with my breach with Harriet, he was too low spun, to be told what I knew would be disagreeable to him; I will now acquaint him with it; he will naturally suppose me hurt by the disappointment, and that a short excursion to the continent will be adviseable to wear out the impression.

I will open the affair to Maria, and then, in a few days, shall rejoin you, at the old hotel. I told my father, it was better to sound Maria's inclinations first; as she was too delicate to wish to owe his success merely to her mother's interposition, who perhaps, if she found her daughter averse, would exert her authority to an inhuman degree. He acquiesced, and tomorrow—I shall have no sleep to night—I am to talk to the dear girl. What shall I say! How shall I look! My countenance,

nance, my eyes will betray me, and give the lye to every argument enforced by my tongue.

In that trying moment I hope to remember that the happiness of the tenderest of fathers, the warmest and truest of friends, is at stake; and that it would be impossible for me to enjoy any felicity which must be built upon the ruins of his.

Farewel, Charles, believe me truly yours.

L E T T E R XVIII.

Lord Frederick Alston to Charles Seymour, Esq.

THE dreaded scene is past, and I still breath—still drag on weary, tiresome existence. When the hour drew near, my cowardly heart drooped; and had it not been for the fear of my father's seeing through the flimsy excuse, and penetrating the real reason, I had endeavoured to persuade him to urge his suit in person, and not by an ambassador. When I reached the house, I enquired for Maria. I wished not to see any other of the family, and, luckily, they were not at home; they were upon a visit, and Moreton with them.

I was conducted into Maria's dressing-room, an elegant little apartment, orna-

mented with her own drawings and work, in both which she excels; and some beautiful shell flowers of her own forming. Her father's picture made the principal object, a very graceful figure indeed, and Maria is much like him: I had leisure to contemplate, as Maria was in another part of the house, and did not appear immediately; every specimen of her taste and ingenuity became interesting, in proportion as my despair of attaining her increased;—and I was lost in a confusion of excruciating reflections, when she entered the room.—She received my compliments, which were sufficiently embarrassed, and scarcely articulate, with evident confusion. I led her to a chair, seated myself beside her, and was some moments before I was able to speak.

My silence, my embarrassment increased the dear girl's confusion. My eyes were fixed on her face, whilst hers were thrown upon the carpet; her face and neck crimsoned over with a beautiful glow. Heavens, what were my sensations! I dared not to assign a cause for her sweet bashfulness, and hastened to speak my errand, lest I should be tempted to turn pleader for myself.

This, with much hesitation, I affected. She treated it at first as a jest, and it was some time before I could make her believe

I was

I was really in earnest. I shall not trouble you with the *minutiæ* of conversation; I wish I could forget some parts of it myself. She seemed surprized, displeased, and averse: the more averse she appeared, the more warmly I pleaded; till she grew quite angry, and I was silenced upon the subject.

But upon what other could I entertain her!—we neither of us spoke for some time—our eyes sometimes met; I dared not trust mine, so instantly withdrew them. At last, feeling this mute interview more dangerous than the talking one had been; I arose with a deep sigh, which I could not suppress; took my leave with a profound bow, and hurried out of the house.

My mind was oddly set as I rode home. I was pleased, and yet I was grieved at the averfeness she had discovered; some little circumstances—some observations I had made, gave me both pleasure and pain.

I dared not communicate to my father the warmth of her refusal, but recommended to him to urge his own suit. I have acquainted him with the behaviour of Harriet, and he consents, though reluctantly, to a few months visit to the Continent, as I assure him, I cannot think of remaining in this part of the world, a moment longer than is absolutely necessary to get things in order for my journey; and that

that I would not make but one visit more to Belville-place, and that for the purpose of taking leave, for worlds. All this is literally true, though he mistakes the object—it is necessary for our happiness, we should be deceived some times.

He has been since, once or twice, to visit Maria; but first communicated the intention of his visits to her mother, who had not the least suspicion of his attachment to her youngest daughter; but imagined from the beginning of his conversation, that he was going to declare a passion for herself, and the scene, I think, must have been droll enough. She appeared piqued, he says, when she understood him; and poor Maria, I am afraid, will not be treated the better for this disappointment of her vanity; she, however, gave him leave to propose the matter to her daughter, which he did. He cannot, he says, boast much of success; but does not at present despair, and hopes in time, to win her consent.

I dare not see her at present; how I shall acquit myself in a farewell visit, heaven knows. I long to be out of this kingdom, Adieu.

L E T.

L E T T E R XIX.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

I WRITE, my dear Louisa, because you desire it; but alas! I have nothing to say, but that I feel myself exceedingly unhappy; and that internal peace, which was my support, amidst all my afflictions, is, I am afraid, destroyed for ever by the caprice of this wayward heart of mine.

To you, my dear, I confess all my weaknesses; and in your faithful bosom—where let them be deeply hid from every eye—pour all my sorrows. I have before told you, Lord Frederick Alston was the most amiable of men; handsome in his person, graceful in his manner; with a most comprehensive understanding and refined wit, joined to a benevolence of heart and sweetness of temper, equalled by few, excelled by none; then judge the danger of a young heart unconscious of its weakness, from an intimacy with such an one, addressed by the name of sister, with all the softness and tenderness of the most affectionate of brothers. It was that bewitching softness and manner, that tender compassion beaming in those fine eyes, that stole away a heart naturally too susceptible for the peace of its owner. Unused
to

to kindness, it was doubly affected, and became a captive under the specious name of gratitude; to that I imputed the soft emotions his unexpected appearance at any time gave me, or the melancholy his absence spread over my mind. I rambled in solitude, recollecting all the little circumstances of his tender attentions; he was the object of my contemplation by day, and my dream by night. I beheld with pain, his approaching union with my sister; but even this did not open my eyes to the true state of my heart, as I imputed it to a generous concern for his happiness, which his marriage with a woman of so very contrary a character must have inevitably destroyed.

I thought sometimes his passion for her visibly cooled; that he had discovered her real temper, and was embarrassed how to break off an affair with honour, which had gone such lengths. My heart was filled with anguish, at what I thought he must suffer upon the occasion, and I complimented myself on the generosity of its feelings.

One afternoon, Lord Frederick brought Lord Moreton with him, a thing just imported from Paris, with all the coxcomality, without one of the virtues of its gay inhabitants; he was all feathers, lace, and embroidery; no coquette in the meridian of her charms, had more airs or affectation.

This

This animal seemed greatly struck with the beauty of Harriet ; his fine coat, and foreign airs, had an equal effect upon her ; no two people could be more exactly calculated for each other ; and they seemed to be instantly affected by an irresistible sympathy ; he saw nothing but her ; she had ears for no one but him ; and poor Lord Frederick sat entirely neglected. I looked at him ; pleasure sparkled in his eyes ; I participated in his joy, and was never in better spirits ; we chatted with unusual vivacity, and appeared mutually loth to part.

His father was introduced to our family ; I took uncommon pains to please him ; alas, I succeeded but too well. He gave a ball ; my sister, before she went, engaged herself to dance with Lord Moreton, which as soon as Lord Frederick knew, he flew to engage my hand ; the excessive pleasure which I felt at his tender, polite attentions first brought me acquainted with the real state of my heart. His eyes spoke the most seducing language, and he pressed my hand with an ardor, that gave me emotions I was afraid he should discover.

I saw him the next morning, and found he had quarrelled with my sister for her coquetry with Lord Moreton ; methought his eyes avowed *another* reason for the rupture ; enchanting were the prospects that now arose to my imagination ; my heart acknowledged

acknowledged its passion, and promised itself the happiest consequences.

What then were my emotions yesterday, when he desired to speak to me in private!—My heart palpitated at the demand. He appeared confused, embarrassed; I placed it to the account of a love, so oddly circumstanced as ours had been. He tried to speak, yet could scarcely articulate a word; seemed going to take my hand—then suddenly withdrew his own. My confusion and emotions were great; he saw them, and it increased his embarrassment. At last—with great hesitation, and yet in a hurrying manner, he acquainted me with the passion.—Oh Louisa, not his own, but his father's!—A passion ardent and generous; talked about disinterested love, and splendid settlements.

Judge my feelings Louisa, sudden and unexpected, as was this subversion of all my darling hopes, raised to their highest pitch.—I could scarcely refrain from tears—yet I gathered breath enough, as he proceeded, to give him a very warm, and, I am afraid, a very unpolite refusal. He pleaded so pathetically, that I was at last quite angry, and desired he would leave me, and never more trouble me upon the subject.—I do not know how my petulance appeared to him; but he sat silent some minutes—he looked at me—our eyes met.

Ah

Ah Louisa!—but there is no truth—at least I am apt to interpret wrong the language of the eye—he sighed—suddenly rose—made a low bow and retired. I flew to my closet, locked myself in, and indulged myself in a violent passion of tears, which gave a momentary relief to the load which oppressed my heart.

When casting my eyes upon my father's picture, which you may remember hangs there, drawn by myself; for I thought I never could have too many representations of that beloved, revered countenance, whose features it was my greatest delight to trace; casting my eyes as I said upon it, methought the awful shadow seemed to frown, and I blushed at the consciousness of my own weakness, as if the canvas had been animated, and the dear departed spirit a witness to the transports of my grief and despair.

I asked myself if my present behaviour was worthy the precepts of such a master. I recalled all his lectures upon the due regulation of the passions, which are wrote in indelible characters in my memory, and by degrees my heart regained some degree of composure. I began now to reflect what my mother would think—whom I supposed was returned with Harriet from her visit, by this time—of my having an interview with Lord Frederick, and shutting myself up the moment he was gone.

However,

However, as I had made myself unfit to appear that night ; as soon as the swelling of my eyes was a little abated, I rang the bell, and when my mother's woman appeared, desired her to excuse me to my mother for not attending her ; for that I had so violent a head ach——which was very true——that I was not able to sit up, but should go immediately to bed.

Which I did. But composed as I thought myself, sleep was a stranger to my eyes ; I reviewed the incidents of my past life, and future prospects, and concluded from both, that the portion of happiness assigned me by the Almighty, was not to be on *this* side the grave ; I bowed in humble acquiescence to the divine will, convinced that my own misconduct alone could deprive me of that never ending felicity, promised to the humble and the penitent *on the other*. Let then the attainment of *that* alone be my ambition ; on *that* distant but glorious prospect let me fix my attention ; and the asperities of my path will be smoothed, I shall be insensible to the thorns which envy and malignance scatter before me ; begin my Heaven in my own breast, and retire to its sweet consoling whispers, from the storms without ; waiting with patient expectation that happy hour, that shall free me from this load of mortality, and wing my soul to the regions of blessedness.

Adieu, my dearest Louisa.

L E T-

L E T T E R XX.

Lord Frederick Alston, to Charles Seymour, Esq.

I HAVE bade adieu to all my soul holds dear ; have taken, perhaps, an eternal farewell ; for can I ever behold her as the wife of my father !—may he be as happy, as love can make him ; but years must pass away, before I can be a witness of his felicity.

My father would accompany me, when I made my farewell visit to the Belvilles.—I could have excused him this instance of his tenderness, for such it was ; for love is an eagle-eyed passion, however the deity came to be painted blind, and I was apprehensive of discovering myself.

Maria was not well ; but instantly made her appearance upon being informed we were there. She received my father's compliments with a distant politeness, and a downcast eye ; he led her to a chair, and almost engrossed her conversation. An unusual gravity sat on her sweet face ; and there was a langour, a melting softness in her eye I never saw there before.

The conversation chiefly turned upon the route I intended pursuing. She talked but little ; but our eyes often met, and
might,

might, I believe their tender, their flattering language—I must not dwell upon the thought. We staid late; I was exceedingly loth to take my leave—could I have but spoken three words in private to her—yet what could I have said?

At last I rose, took my leave with perfect ease of Mrs. Belville and Harriet; but trembled when I approached Maria, and scarcely knew what I did—almost wild, I pressed her hand to my lips, and then to my bosom, and would have uttered blessings, but my voice was choaked. The dear girl was little less agitated, her bosom heaved with soft emotion; a pearly dew-drop filled each eye; they gently stole upon her glowing cheek, and were succeeded by two others; may heaven bless you wheresoever you go! with a voice scarcely articulate she said; again I kissed her hand; the dear girl recollecting herself, gently withdrew it; and with a sigh, and courtseying low, wished me health and happiness; I returned as low a bow, and with a sliding one to the other ladies, rushed out of the room, followed by my father. I threw myself into the coach, and we neither of us spoke, till we arrived at home; how his thoughts were employed, I know not; you will have no difficulty to guess what occupied mine—May the sigh which heaved her gentle bosom, when I took my leave,

leave, be the last she breaths on my account. I *will* have no wish, but for my father's happiness, and when I feel for her; the calm tenderness of a brother for a beloved sister, then—and not until then, will I revisit my native soil.

A soul so gentle as hers, must be happy in a man of my father's temper; happy too, in being freed from the tyranny of two such infernal tempers, as Mrs. Belville and Harriet.

Farewel, Charles; but not a long farewell, for I shall stay but two days in London and three more, hope to embrace my friend. Ever yours.

P. S. Your letter is this moment brought me. Unfortunate for me, who had promised myself the soothing society of a friend, that you leave France so soon after my entering it! If that is the case, I shall pass the Alps; Italy, in *my* opinion, affords the mind more rational amusement, than the gay kingdom you have resided in so long. And *are* you tired of eccentric pleasure? and *will* you seek out and discover what kind of wife your good father, so many years ago, chose for you; and if you approve the choice, settle with her in the sober joys of matrimony? Ah Charles! I doubt your resolution. But if I *must* lose the company of my friend, may it be for a change so infinitely to his advantage.

I have

I have heard many encomiums on the lady in question, and all agree, that she is a very lovely and a very amiable girl. Once more farewell.

L E T T E R XXI.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

HE is gone, my dear. I have endured the pang of parting from all my soul holds dear.—Perhaps have taken a *last* farewell; so uncertain is life! as it is, the distance will be so great between us, that I can scarcely regard him as an inhabitant of the same world, and have suffered almost as much as if the summons of death had snatched him from me. My vivacity is flown, my spirits sink, the colour flies from my cheek—but why trouble my friend with these affairs—every mark of decay is one step taken to the blessed regions of immortality, the happiness *alone* intended me by the God of all wisdom. With *that* in view, my mother's cruelty loses its sting; she intends to humble me, and I *am* humbled to the dust. I will not be teized into fretfulness and despondency; though she forgets her duty, never will I forget what is due to the sacred name of mother. But indeed, my dear,

dear, my patience is sometimes put to severe trials; she used to have intervals of good humour, and something like tenderness; but now she has none.

I have thought, sometimes, that she had an inclination for the Earl of Belmour herself, and hates me as a successful rival. I do verily believe, she never would have encouraged his address to me, had she not seen how greatly it distressed me. Yet much as I revere the parental authority, no force on earth shall ever drag me to the altar with him; for would it not be a mental incest, to wed the father when my whole soul is devoted to the son?

That son—I have sometimes thought he loved me; his eyes—but I am little acquainted with the language of love, and most likely mistook the expressions of esteem and friendship, for a softer passion. His disappointment with my sister was the reason *assigned*—and why not the *real* reason?—for his leaving England.—I must try to forget him. Would my mother but permit me to spend a few weeks at A. I think “with thee conversing” my mind would return to its wonted composure—but that is a vain hope.

Write to me, my love; your letters, my books, and my father’s miniature picture, could I have my wish, should be my only companions. My present lowness of spirits

rits brings my loss of him strongly again to memory; I recollect every word that passed in the last solemn scenes; and my tears stream as freshly for him, as in the first weeks of my affliction; these are, I know, weaknesses; but they are weaknesses I have scarcely a wish to surmount; my heart has exquisite sensibilities, is tender to excess, which has been hitherto a source of pain.— I might say, of torture to me; in another state it will ripen into bliss; this, I repeat, alone supports me.

Adieu, my dearest Louisa, may you be happy, is the ardent prayer of your

MARIA BELVILLE.

L E T T E R XXII.

Miss Harriet Belville to Miss Eliza Forster.

WELL, Eliza, Lord Frederick has left England; he could not support with composure, my preference of the enchanting Moreton, so he has taken himself into France. I have nothing now to trouble me, but the absurd passion of his father for Maria. But why, cries your ladyship, should that give you uneasiness? the girl will be provided for, without expence, and you will be rid

of

of a rival, who has proved herself of more consequence than you apprehended.

All this is very true, my dear ; but you forget that Moreton is but a baron, the other an earl ; consequently, her marriage with that old dotard, will intitle her, upon all occasions, to the precedence ; and do you think my spirit can ever support that ? —No, Eliza, she shall never have him, though I know I am doing her a kindness, in breaking off the affair ; for I see she hates him very cordially.—Yet, perhaps, I may oblige her more than I intend, for I have thought sometimes that she loved Lord Frederick ; and I have now and then had my suspicions that he liked her, and that possibly it might be his father's passion for her, not his disappointment with me, that sent him abroad. And if this should be the case, it would be clearing the way, at some distant period, for a completion of their wishes—Ah, my dear ! that match would be a million of times worse than the other ; for with the father, with all the advantages of pomp and precedence, I should have to comfort myself that she was really wretched ; with the other—Positively, Eliza, it shall not be ; the marriage with the father will destroy all her hopes, root and branch—but can I bear her taking place of me ?—the idea is insupportable

But what hinders me from marrying her to somebody else ? She has two or three

F

lovers,

lovers, who have but lately desisted from visiting her, on the introduction of the old Don and if they found him dismissed, would soon renew their addresses—She shall be married to one of them as soon as possible.

Who would have imagined that this girl could have given me so much trouble?—When I view my own person, and look at hers, I cannot conceive how it is possible for her to attract a single eye, when I stand beside her—yet she actually made several conquests when we appeared together:—Some people have strange depraved tastes!

Adieu, my dear; I see Moreton's phaeton flying up the avenue.

L E T T E R XXIII.

Miss Maria Belville, to Miss Louisa Fermor.

CONGRATULATE me my dear Louisa; my mother has convinced me, within these few hours, that she is not altogether so devoid of tenderness and affection for me as I had imagined.

Lord Belmour, who, the day after his son left him, was obliged, upon some account or other, I forgot what, to go to another seat which he has in B--shire, returned

ed but yesterday; when he immediately made me a visit. We had company with us; so that he had no opportunity of entertaining me alone, as I suppose he wished to do. His style of address was exceeding tender and respectful: he certainly is a most amiable man—and had I never seen his son—I was utterly at a loss how to behave to him, so as to treat him with the politeness due to his rank—due to his merit without that consideration—without any encouragement to the lover. The difficulty threw a kind of embarrassment over even my thoughts; in short, I felt unhappy, and, after the company was gone, remained stupid and melancholy.

My mother, with whom I happened to be alone, took notice of my dejection, and, with a kindness unusual to her, enquired if I was ill: on my assuring her I was perfectly well, she said, that she had observed lately I had lost my vivacity, and she was afraid something hung heavy upon my mind. If that was the case, she intreated that I would unbosom myself to her, and I should find her the most affectionate of mothers, who would do every thing in her power to make me happy.

A tenderness so unusual melted my soul; I threw myself on my knees before her and seizing one of her hands, and kissing it, I thanked her in the most ardent

terms for her goodness. On her again requiring the cause of my uneasiness, and hinting that she imagined the addresses of the Earl of Belmour disagreeable to me; I frankly acknowledged they were highly so; and that, amiable as that nobleman certainly was, my heart recoiled at the idea of him as a husband.

She told me, that though the match was in all respects agreeable to her, and advantageous to me; yet, if I felt that invincible repugnance I expressed, she had too great a regard to my happiness to press it any farther, or exert her authority for its completion—I had her leave to dismiss my lover, in the manner I thought most proper, trusting to my discretion to do it with the politeness due to his rank, and his generous proposals in my favour.

I again thanked her, and almost devoured her hand with my grateful emotions. She left me soon after, and I retired to my closet to write to his lordship. I wrote and tore several sheets of paper before I could please myself; and at last concluded one, more from fatigue of spirits, than my being better pleased with it, than my other attempts. After having sealed it, ready for the morning, I went down to my mother and sister, who both behaved to me with the tenderness of those near and dear relationships; and they found
me

me with a heart overflowing with gratitude in return.

The next morning I dispatched my epistle to the Earl, and for these two days I have been happy in the smiles of my family; pray with me, my dear Louisa, that they may be continued to the truly affectionate

M. B.!

L E T T E R XXIV.

Miss Harriet Belville, to Miss Eliza Forster,

I AM not in spirits, Eliza, though I have broke off the match between Maria and the old doating Earl. You would have died to have seen the gratitude of the girl to me and her mother, for suffering her, out of our great regard to her happiness, and contrary to our mutual opinions of the great advantages which would accrue to her, break off the connection. You cannot think how happy, and how tender, and how fond we are grown—pray heaven it lasts. These good folks are so easily imposed upon, that there is no merit in deceiving them.

Would to God she was fairly married and gone; she has such art of talking herself

into peoples good graces, that I begin to be in a fright whenever she opens her mouth. Not that I am afraid of Moreton; for he despises her as much as myself; but I am sometimes afraid she should steal into my mother's affections, who, I think, does not use me well.

Moreton, I know, dies for me; it is impossible for a man to love with more ardency; but he confesses, with the most generous openness, that his affairs, from youthful imprudencies, are much embarrassed; and that he cannot afford to marry a woman who has a fortune less than forty thousand pounds: and that though death must be the consequence of giving up all hope of possessing me, yet that darling hope must be given up, if my mother does not chuse to give me that sum—which is in her power to do—for that it would be worse than death not to be able to support the woman he so fondly doats on, in the style and character she was formed by nature to shine in.

Now my mother, from some paltry considerations, refuses this sum; she says, she must, to advance it, give up all her money, and sell her jointure; and that the whole will be scarcely sufficient to make it up; then on what has she to depend? and what must become of Maria?

To

To this I answer, that she can never find the want of an estate whilst Moreton and myself possess it. That we shall only be her stewards, and supremely happy in supplying her with every thing she wants.

That as to Maria, as she has the art of inspiring such disinterested passions, there is no doubt but some one of her lovers will take her off her hands without a fortune ; and I think the sooner she marries the better.

But she does not acquiesce in my reasonings ; and I have been in the pouts these two days. I almost wish I had let the girl marry the old man—she always stands in the way of my happiness. But a husband of some sort I am determined to find for her. There is a Mr. Mordant and a Mr. Graham. both wonderfully fond of her ; if either of them will take her, with a thousand or two pounds, marry she shall, though her heart breaks the next fortnight.

I know the soft tender soul will sigh, and weep, and all that ; but she is such a sweet, good, pious child, that she will rather die than be undutiful to mamma ; and when once I am rid of her, I can easily manage matters with my mother——So I shall then let my own affair lie dormant, whilst I manage the pretty Maria's.

I think I have an excellent head, Eliza; Did you imagine I had been such a plotter? But love, my dear, almighty love, effects wonderful things, Adieu.

L E T T E R XXV.

[*Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.*]

ALAS! my dear Louisa, your unhappy friend is made to smart severely for the few pleasing hours she has basked in the sunshine of a mother's smiles. Her hatred, a strong word, my dear, but, I am afraid, too justly expressive, after having suffered itself to be for a little time relaxed, returns, with redoubled fury, to its natural bent.

Who would have thought, that after being so indulgent to me in the Earl of Belmour's affair, she should insist upon my chusing an husband out of two men she has named to me, and has left me but a week to determine? In vain I assure her that my heart rejects them both—that I cannot, consistently with my ideas of that solemn engagement, vow to love, honour and obey either. My objections are ridiculed; my tears laughed at; my pathetic remonstrances

Frances answered with bitter taunts—Oh! Louisa, what a fate is mine! Yet let me not forget that my persecutrix is a mother!

I do not think you know either of the men—My spirits are not sufficiently composed to give their finished portraits, and you must be content to take the outlines only of each piece. Their names are Mordant and Graham; both men of affluent fortunes, and both offer to take me without any——That, my dear, it is which hastens my fate—My happiness is to be sacrificed to Harriet's ambition—Down stubborn heart. Mr. Graham is about thirty; rather handsome and well made, with a polite address, and insinuating manner; does not appear to want understanding, but it is of the dark, artful, designing kind; has a sufficiency of vivacity to make his conversation infinitely agreeable to the generality of the female world; as many an artless girl has found to her cost:—a libertine in his practice; an atheist in his principles.

Mr. Mordant is about twenty-four; possesses a very moderate share of understanding; nothing handsome in his person, nor courtly in his address; but all his acquaintance agree, that he is *an exceeding good sort of young man*.

That phrase always conveys to my imagination the idea of a neutral being, between good and evil; rather implies an

absence of vice, than a possession of virtue; no debauchee, no libertine, no gamester—a mighty good sort of man. One misfortune attendant on this character is, that as this neutral state is oftener the effect of chance than principle, an unhappy concurrence of circumstances has sometimes transformed the exceeding good sort of *young man* into a very profligate *old one*.

This, my dear, is a slight sketch of the characters of the two men, one of whom my mother insists, in the most determined manner, I shall vow to love and honour—Is it possible I can do either? Oh! Louisa, tell me, advise your unhappy friend how to extricate herself from this horrid dilemma.

If I must marry one of the two—which gracious heaven defend me from—I shall not hesitate a moment in my choice; for no power on earth shall oblige me to wed vice and infidelity. Mordant, I believe, loves me; his conversation, however insipid, will never shock me; I *may* be tolerably *easy* with him, though it is impossible to be *happy*—Oh! Louisa, should that be the case, I must burn the little portrait which I had drawn for Lord F. and endeavour for ever to exclude his idea from my heart.

Did I tell you I had [a letter from the Earl of Belmour in answer to mine; a very

very tender and polite one it is. He laments very pathetically my cruelty, and his own hard fate. He has left his seat in our neighbourhood, and it is supposed is gone abroad to his son. Adieu.

L E T T E R XXVI.

Miss Maria Belville, to Miss Louisa Fermor,

I AM distracted, Louisa. What shall I do? or what determine? My mother insists, with the most cruel obstinacy, that I shall marry; but suppose that I *could* bring my heart to obey her, should I not, by so doing, endanger my everlasting salvation? All considerations of happiness *here* are not worth a moment's thought; but let me not forfeit my *only* hope.

I must vow to love, honour and obey a being that my heart refuses to love, and my reason to honour. To obey is in my own power, and literally shall that part be fulfilled whenever I marry; but my affections are not; and it is impossible to honour the unworthy. I am no casuist—let me have your good father's opinion, which is the lightest offence; to perjure my soul with vows I never can perform,
or

for disobey an unreasonable and cruel parent?—Alas! before I have his answer, my fate will be determined—My whole soul recoils at the idea of such a marriage—cruel mother—my head or heart must be ruined by the conflict.

Oh! Louisa, could I make my conscience easy, I believe I should obey; I was not born to be happy—so let me be miserable in the way she thinks most proper for me.

I cannot add another word.

L E T T E R XXVII.

Miss Maria Belville to Miss Louisa Fermor.

I AM set down, my Louisa, but in a state of mind it is impossible to describe to you—Gracious heaven! *am* I then married?—the wife of *Mordant*—He the man whose conversation should inform, instruct, amuse me; direct my conduct, and improve my understanding? and have I vowed in the awful presence of Heaven—called that great Being to witness, whose piercing eye views the inmost recesses of the heart, that I will faithfully love, honour and obey him?—I have—and this stubborn swelling

ling heart shall be broken, or made to bend to its duty.

This morning, Louisa, this—I must arrest my pen, or it will wander strangely.

I am not sufficiently composed to give you any particulars, or inform you of what dragged me to the altar, or supported me there from sinking into the arms of death, rather than such——

I must, I find, conclude; for my pen is disposed to rebel against my judgement and my duty. Farewel my dearest, much loved friend; may you ever be a stranger to the hundredth part of the anguish that tears the heart of the wretched

MARIA.

L E T T E R XXVIII.

Miss Harriet Belville to Miss Eliza Forster.

JOY, Eliza, give me joy on the completion of all my wishes: Maria is married; my mother prevailed upon to settle her whole fortune upon me; and the day after to-morrow gives me wealth, grandeur, and Moreton—rich cloaths, fine jewels, superb equipages, and a title, with the most enchanting fellow in the universe—What can a female heart desire more?

Maria's

Maria's heart would be ready to burst with envy, could she see me in all my glory; the mortification, however, I shall spare her for the present; for I die to exhibit myself in public. Do you think such a person as mine, with the farther advantage of being new too, will make no small noise in the *beau monde*?

We shall set out immediately for his lordship's seat in Suffex, spend there the first fortnight; then fly up to town, be presented at court, and launch into all the delights of public life.

Why must your crazy old aunt and uncle confine you for ever to the hideous country? Cannot you make an elopement for a month, to enjoy with me the pleasures of the town? Try child, try what influence you have over them, and hasten to me immediately.

We had sad tragedy doings with our other marriage. Maria kneeled, and wept, and prayed most pathetically. My mother was however inflexible; and when she found that her fine plaintive airs was to no purpose, only think what a taste she exhibited in her choice of a husband! in taking the aukward, insipid Mordant, before Graham, who is really a fine fellow, only because he has made fools of a few silly credulous girls; and is now and then a little witty upon that obsolete old-fashioned

shioned book the Bible.—It is astonishing how any body can cry this girl up for fine sense. I think she has acted like a downright idiot.

I had more difficulty than I imagined in making my mother surrender her fortune ; but the eclat of title and equipage had its weight ; and I was so *exceedingly* fond—so tender, so much hurt at her seeming to doubt my duty and love, that at length she yielded. She is always to live with us, and to be allowed a handsome annuity for her private expences.

—I am called to try on my cloaths—white and silver lilac and silver—but do not think I am going to describe my finery ; positively, Eliza, you shall come and see.

L E T T E R XXIX.

Mrs Mordant to Miss Louisa Fermor.

PARDON me, my dear ; I cannot give you the particulars you require ; those painful scenes are too recent to be described by me at present. Be content to know only in general, that my intreaties, prayers, and tears were in vain ; my mother was inexorable ; it was my duty to obey her, and
I am

I am——married. Amidst the excruciating tortures which wrung my heart, a sense of having performed my duty alone supported me—But it is past; my destiny is sealed and I must make the best of it.

I was a few days after carried to Mr. Mordant's house, a fine old family mansion, which he was put but lately in possession of by the death of an uncle, his father's eldest brother. It is quite in the gothic stile, and about fourteen miles from Belville-place. My mother and Harriet accompanied me, staid with me a week, to assist me in receiving company, and in adjusting my family affairs; they then returned.

The bustle has been of infinite use to me, and I am at present busied in reforming the garden. I am exceedingly ingenious in finding myself employment, and, like a modern giddy girl, banish thought and reflection as far from me as possible.

Mr. Mordant behaves with a tenderness which makes me blush for my own ingratitude—Alas, my Louisa!—but our affections are *not* in our own power—I hope to make amends for the want of a heart by good-humour and obligingness.

And now, my dear, that I am a little settled, and somewhat composed, I insist upon your spending a few weeks with me. I repeat the word *insist*, for I cannot, will not

not be denied; the refusal would break my heart. Say every thing tender and respectful—you cannot say more than my heart subscribes to—to good Dr. Fermor, to induce him to spare his beloved daughter a few weeks to her ardently affectionate

M. M.

L E T T E R XXX.

Mrs. Mordant to Miss Louisa Fermor.

I AM inexpressibly disappointed. And you actually will not—that is, you say, you *cannot*, make me the visit I so ardently wish for, Louisa? And are you really preparing for a journey to the South of France?—the reason you assign is not to be resisted; may that soft and gentle climate have every salutary effect on your good father's health! I know too well the value of so precious a life to repeat the request, or urge the protraction of a single moment from a purpose of such consequence. I *will* be content with your letters; but you must write *very* often, and give me an account of every thing you see that is worth notice. Remember that I never was abroad,

broad, and that it will be doing me a particular kindness to bring me acquainted with so polite a nation as the French. I expect a faithful journal of every incident; nothing can be trifling that concerns my friend.

But you must not expect me to be a regular correspondent; my life affords no subjects for frequent letters. After I have given you a history of my ranunculas, my auriculas and tulips, I shall have nothing left to say.

Harriet is married to her favourite Moreton, and set out for a seat his lordship has in Suffex as soon as the ceremony was over, my mother with them; so that I have not had the felicity of congratulating the happy pair: that they may continue so is my ardent wish; and that my mother may never repent the unbounded confidence she has placed in their generosity and gratitude; for I am almost certain, that, unless she had given up every thing, Moreton, with all his affectation of love, would never have married Harriet.

Adieu, my love. May every blessing attend your steps, and the Fountain all Health prosper your journey! Adieu, Adieu.

L E T.

L E T T E R XXXI.

Lady Moreton, to Miss Eliza Forster.

HOW sincerely I regret your absence, Eliza, from this enchanting region of happiness! where we wander from one scene of gaiety to another, and are lost in an agreeable confusion of felicity. Lord Moreton is the most polite of husbands, and your little friend's head almost turned with the admiration she excites wherever she appears. An envious old Aunt of his Lordship's, who, because she has a large fortune, thinks herself intitled to say the rudest things, tells me, it is only because my face is new, and that admiration will cease with novelty. But her malice does not mortify me; my glass tells me she is mistaken, and that features, such as mine, must always be admired whilst they remain the same.—Hey, Eliza, do not you think so?

I am a happy creature! why will not your spiteful Aunt and Uncle permit you to share my felicity? my cloaths are splendid,

did, my jewels costly, and the sweetest equipage you ever sat eyes on.

My mother, I assure you, is not without her admirers, she has still some fine remains which she is not a little vain of, poor soul; the admiration I meet with, assists it greatly, as every body agrees I am exceedingly like her. So that we are all in perfect good humour with each other.

I have had little time, and less inclination to write to Mrs. Mordant; for she knows nothing of the joys of this paradise, and I hate her sentimental stuff. Yet I do wish her to be witness to my grandeur, that I might make her die with envy at the difference of our fortunes. I think I must invite her to town for a few weeks. Here I shall not fear her as a rival, for nobody will have any taste for her nonsensical parade, and *outré* conversation.

Adieu, Eliza, I am engaged in a most enchanting *partee* and cannot stay a moment longer.

L. E. T.

L E T T E R XXXII.

Mrs. Mordant to Miss Louisa Fermor.

THANK you, my dear, for your entertaining account of your voyage and journey. I read some parts of it to Mr. Mordant, who was quite delighted with my charming friend's vivacity. He is a sweet tempered man, and takes so much pains, and is so anxious to oblige me, that I must be one of the most ungrateful women breathing, not to appear pleased and happy.

You desire an account of our neighbourhood. As we are so near Belville-place, we have some families visit us from that vicinity; those who are new to me are pretty much in the usual style, not sufficiently characteristic to deserve a particular description; most of them being *mighty good sort of people*. They are all exceedingly civil, and appear very much disposed to admire your friend, who endeavours to entertain them with all the vivacity and good humour she can muster up.

The gentlemen are most of them sportsmen, fond of their bottle, and so very desirous of initiating Mr. Mordant into their bacchanalian revels, that I am sometimes
afraid

afraid his good humour and natural inclination to oblige, will lead him to be too complaisant to their importunities.

My principal acquaintance is a Mrs. Spencer, an exceeding amiable woman, whose husband is a gentleman of small fortune pretty near us. There is something in her conversation which pleases me infinitely; not for its vivacity, for she has rather a grave turn, but for its plain good sense, its unaffected piety, and humility. Educated entirely in the country, she has not the ease and the politeness of the fine lady; but she has, what is infinitely better, the most undisguised frankness, the most melting benevolence, and a large share of that divine charity “which thinketh no evil.”

In conversing with more shining characters, the mind, with a kind of emulation almost unperceived by itself, endeavours at an equality, and exerts all its powers; with others it appears guarded and reserved, as if afraid, if it acted altogether naturally, it should be liable to a malignant interpretation; but with Mrs. Spencer, secure from malevolent misconstruction, and its little vanities having nothing to fear from an assumed superiority, it suffers itself to appear simply and without reserve, as nature formed it, and yields itself up to a pleasing indolence.

Most

Most people make a display of their understanding, their good qualities, and benevolent actions; but the gentle, unobtrusive Mrs. Spencer leaves you to discover hers; can you then wonder, that as the generality of the world is very little inclined to *search* into the meritorious part of a person's character, that hers is so little understood? and that you generally find it huddled up in the common phrase, of an exceeding good natured, *good sort of woman*?

By way of contrast to Mrs. Spencer, let me introduce you to Mrs. Lunly, another visitant, though not in so great a degree of intimacy. She is a reading travelled lady, with a very moderate understanding, but an excellent memory; which enables her to entertain one with all she has read, with tedious and minute descriptions of all she has seen, with her own bon-mots, and those of all her acquaintance, not omitting those of James the footboy, and Sturgeon the fisherman; with every compliment she has ever received, and with every kind and benevolent action she or her husband has done in all their lives. This lady's character was announced to me, and she is generally acknowledged to be, one of the most sensible and agreeable of women, and
one

120 THE RENCONTRE; or,

one of the most entertaining companions
in the world.

Believe me, my dearest Louisa, your
truly affectionate

M. M.



END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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